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60th year of publication

Is Canada welching on Kyoto?

Harry der Nederlanden

After the recent meeting in Bonn, where Canada's Environment Minister Rona Ambrose announced that we would not be able to meet our Kyoto target, where does Canada stand vis a vis the global accord to limit greenhouse gas emissions? Have we abandoned it? What is the future of Kyoto? After having been declared dead several times before, has it at last been given the coup de grace? How are we going to address the threat of global warming? Or has that threat been vastly exaggerated? Or is it already too late?

Even before she went to Bonn, Ambrose had people calling for her resignation as chair of the conference. Several environmental groups said the Conservative government was out to torpedo Kyoto. Although Ambrose denied this, insisting that Canada had not reneged on its commitment to Kyoto, she also signaled that Canada was looking into entering into a pact with the U.S. and Australia (two countries that did not sign on) to address greenhouse emissions by designing high tech solutions.

On the other hand, Ambrose also got strong support, especially from those who agree with her assessment that the goals Canada signed for are unattainable – unless we are willing to cripple our economy to do so. The Liberal government, perhaps overly optimistic, agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions six percent below 1990 emissions. But over the next decade and a half it did little or nothing to comply except urge citizens to switch to fluorescent bulbs. Now our emissions are 35 percent higher than in 1990. Some now call for



Rona Ambrose

a made-in-Canada approach: with Ambrose, they make a plea for Canada's uniqueness. Our vast distances and cold winters put us at a disadvantage over toward other countries, so let's set our own standards and our own timetable. Still others would just as soon have the government forget about Kyoto and global warming altogether, suspecting it's all simply alarmism.

There are still plenty of global-warming skeptics, even in the scientific community, some with impressive credentials. Although it is clear that there has been a global warming trend since the 70's, some still doubt that it is man-made. The small rise in temperature may simply be part of a natural warming cycle. Such skeptics like to point out that the period from the 40's to the 70's was a period of global cooling. In fact, during the 70's there were predictions of a coming Ice Age. In the meantime, however, climate science has come a long way.

But, lacking scientific expertise, whom do you believe? It is, of course, entirely possible that the scientific community around the world is in thrall to some ideology,

but it seems highly unlikely. To speak of a consensus on the issue may be saying too much, but the great majority of climate experts tend to agree that the gases produced by our burning of fossil fuels have impacted the climate.

How much is still under debate.

But Kyoto is not simply a matter of science. Even among those who fully affirm the science there are Kyoto skeptics. The economics and politics are just as important as the science. And these are probably more difficult to calculate. If compliance with Kyoto crippled the economies of countries like Canada, the U.S. and Australia, sending the global economy into a tailspin, how would we pay for expensive technology to cut emissions? Poverty will not necessarily make us better stewards; on the contrary. And who would be hurt most by a global recession? The developing countries and the poor, of course.

Whatever the cost, reply many environmentalists, the cost of global warming will be much higher. It means that parts of our planet will become uninhabitable, the climate become increasingly unstable, and the very existence of many species threatened. In the end, continuing to generate greenhouse gases will also trigger the collapse of the global economy – and much more besides.

Is it little wonder that, according to a recent Pew poll, global warming is right up there with

Iraq and Iran as cause for worry by worriers around the globe? No matter what we do, it seems, things are bound to get worse.

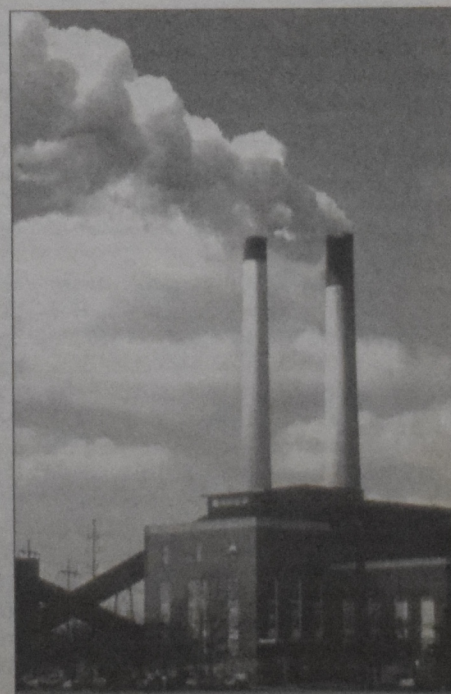
By most accounts, even if Canada were to fully meet its target, which means cutting emissions by some 40 percent, the effect on global warming would be negligible. In fact, even if all the Kyoto signatories were able to meet their targets, the amount of greenhouse gases emitted would continue to increase and so would global warming. The nations with the fastest industrial growth – India and China – are not part of Kyoto. None of the developing countries are. To place their weak economies under such controls would be to condemn them to permanent poverty. At the same time, their growth is directly dependent on the continued economic health of the rich nations.

We seem to have reached a situation in which the pessimists are the optimists and vice versa. Those pessimistic about the effects of global warming and who warn of catastrophes to come are optimistic about our capacity to still do something to alter our present course. Those optimistic about the planet's ability to cope with extra carbon dioxide and the ability of the free market to bring about changes in our collective behavior tend to be pessimistic about the ability of international treaties and governments to reduce carbon emissions.

Kyoto has long served as little more than a banner in Canada to display our good intentions. But there has been little determination behind it. It remains to be seen whether the conservative government shows more determination. Realism about our (in)ability to meet the goals we agreed to is a first step. Ambrose is probably right in asserting that many other signatories (as much as half of them) will also have great difficulty meeting their targets.

The U.K. and Germany are looking good, but that's largely because after the baseline of 1990 Britain's power plants switched from coal to natural gas and Germany shut down the obsolete industries of what was formerly East Germany. Russia was a very late signatory to Kyoto. It signed on only after it found out that it

See Kyoto on p. 2...



News

Keeping the peace in Afghanistan

Harry der Nederlanden

The anti-Western riots in the capital of Afghanistan after a traffic accident involving a military convoy and the ease with which Taliban fighters have moved into the southern part of the country have raised hard questions about the ability of NATO to establish a viable central government in that country. And they will inevitably raise doubts about Canada's role in the "reconstruction" of Afghanistan.

Some critics suggest that, however well-intentioned the elected government of Hamid Karzai, its authority does not reach far beyond Kabul. And it is an authority that depends heavily on foreign troops. There are now some 10,000 native security forces, but they are recent trainees and there are more than two NATO or US soldiers for every Afghan soldier. So Karzai's authority is enforced by troops that do not speak the language and do not understand the culture. Even in Kabul, the recent riots show, law and order are extremely fragile and many are looking for an opportunity to subvert it.

At the first show of violence and armed opposition, the Kabul police melted away, and Karzai had to call out the army to restore order. But the government took action only after a full day of rioting and after most of the damage had already been done. So by most reports both the government and the police performed poorly.

Billions of dollars are being poured into Afghanistan every year, but little of it by all accounts seems to reach the police forces. Canadians may complain about poor equipment for their soldiers serving in Afghanistan, but the Afghan police are poorly equipped, poorly trained and poorly paid. It is the goal of NATO to provide better



Kabul street

security and stability across the country by establishing police posts in every major town. But if they can't be depended on in the capital, how can they provide security elsewhere? Moreover, when the Taliban strike, they are often better armed than the police.

According to Michael Fisher (*National Post*), until recently the Taliban consisted of relatively small groups. But even in groups as small as a dozen they are able to terrorize small unprotected towns and villages scattered about the south. They cross the unpatrolled border from sanctuaries in Pakistan, and the central government in Kabul can offer villagers little or no protection.

Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist,

reports that this year these groups have been growing in size and strength. They terrorize entire towns, burning down schools and government buildings and executing anyone associated with the government. Over the last 16 months they have killed about 2,000 Afghan security guards and civilians. The Taliban have even been known to kill mullahs who support the government.

If the Taliban enter a town, the inhabitants have as much to fear from the NATO forces as from the Taliban – perhaps more so. NATO forces arrive with more lethal firepower. Is it little wonder that the average Afghani is no longer celebrating the arrival of their liberators? To do so may put their lives in danger.

Add to this the fact that the promises of increased prosperity have been extremely slow in coming to most Afghans; in fact, many have seen nothing of the promised reconstruction. Although billions have been poured into the country, and indeed it has shown a growth rate of 17 percent per year since the fall of the Taliban, this has done little or nothing to alleviate the dire poverty of most Afghans. It is still one of the poorest countries in the world, ranked below most African countries.

One of the best sources of income for Afghan farmers has been growing poppies, a prime source of heroine. The poppy fields of Afghanistan supply almost 80 percent of the world's heroine. However, in return for foreign aid, the government has agreed to the eradication of the poppy crops. These were to be replaced by other crops, but the shift has not been going well. No other crop is as lucrative or grows as well in the country. Attempts to eradicate the poppy crops have aroused the same sort of resentment that attempts to eradicate the cacao crop have aroused in Latin America.

A report by the think tank the Senlis Council warns that popular support for

the NATO troops is rapidly evaporating. They are increasingly resented as foreign intruders and part of the US war on terror being waged in Iraq. Little wonder, then, that participation in last year's elections dropped to 53 percent from a high of 70 percent in the presidential election of 2004.

In many areas, says Rashid, poppy farmers cooperate with drug smugglers, who collude with Taliban fighters to distribute heroine abroad, each collecting a share of the earnings. Although opposed to drugs, the Taliban are cooperating in order to buy weapons. So the economy of entire areas is dominated by drug traffickers and warlords.

The drug money also serves to corrupt local officials, further undermining the health of the country.

With the security situation being what it is, few aid agencies are able to provide help. Without help to switch to other crops, officials are understandably reluctant to eradicate the poppy crops, for then the farmers, already poor, would have no livelihood at all. Yet, several different commentators on Afghanistan stress that for the government to work, the country must be weaned from its dependence on the drug trade, for it corrupts everything it touches. But there is little wisdom about how this is to be done when aid agencies cannot safely travel to these areas.

Even in most of the cities, despite the billions poured into the country, reliable electrical power and clean water are hard to come by.

One wonders whether a culture supported by foreign troops, no matter how well armed, is a match for an opposition deeply rooted in a native culture, sharing a same language and religion. The NATO and the Canadian troops are saddled with an extremely tough assignment. That task is made even tougher by the fact that the NATO forces drawn from more than a dozen countries each operate under different restrictions imposed by their respective governments. The Germans, for example, are there only to assist in reconstruction. The Dutch may fight only in self-defense. And who knows about the French?

It is vital that those imposing order be indigenous not foreign troops; however, no one thinks that the Afghan army is anywhere near ready to take over the job. Since the US forces (and NATO) have been in Afghanistan longer than they've been in Iraq, one wonders why there are not more Afghani troops to take over the work. Wouldn't that be cheaper?

Kyoto ... continued from p. 1

would have no trouble at all to come in below 1990 levels. Along with its economy, much of its industrial sector, tanked in the 1990's. It could benefit from Kyoto, perhaps to the tune of billions, for under the carbon-trading scheme that is part of Kyoto countries like Canada that cannot meet their commitment can buy credits from countries like Russia that can.

Kyoto critics ask how the carbon trading scheme helps the earth's environment. How are carbon emissions reduced if a wealthy country like Canada, instead of cutting back, can simply purchase the right to keep spewing CO₂ into the air? The theory, of course, is that governments won't send money abroad if they can help it; instead they will opt to spend it on cleaning up their own environment.

The Harper government seems to be among the optimists, betting on developing improved technologies, but so far it has shown little inclination to put enough pressure on Canadian business and industry – and the public – to make a difference.

However, the Kyoto critics may be right

that it would take Draconian measures and large scale government intervention to cut back to levels equal to 1990 much less 6 percent below them. It would require an awesome level of voluntary cutbacks on the part of Canadians or an awe-some expansion of government authority. Both are hard to get in a democracy.

Without firm targets, caps and a system of inspection, however, it hardly seems likely that the worst "polluters" will clean up on their own. Simply subsidizing public transportation is hardly going to cut it. Canada actually needs something with more teeth than Kyoto because Kyoto has been little more than a campfire song. The U.S. has done better even without signing the accord.

Writing in *Maclean's* (June 5), Steve Maich rejects what he calls "the cult of Kyoto" but poses three goals for any program to work: help poor countries reduce poverty; protect thriving economies in the West; and at the same time reduce reliance on fossil fuels. A big order.

JUNE 26, 2006

Politics

Mogadishu's unfamiliar calm

Islamist control of the city worries Western nations, but Somalis welcome the quiet

Rob Crilly

MOGADISHU, SOMALIA—Ir-Togt gun bazaar takes its name from the sound of AK-47 assault rifles being fired into the air as buyers test the merchandise.

But today its streets are quiet. "This is an American gun — an M16. And there, those are all Russian," says Ali Mohamed, smiling to reveal a mouth filled with metal teeth. He has sold rifles and ammunition to all sides in the anarchy of Mogadishu ever since the collapse of President Siad Barre's brutal regime in 1991.

Things have never been so quiet, he says. Two weeks ago AK-47s sold for \$550 as fresh fighting consumed the city. This week, he cannot move them for \$350.

"Before, there were always two or three groups that I could sell to. Now there is just the Islamic courts and we are worried that they will bring peace here and put us out of business," he says.

A sense of calm has descended on the rubble-filled capital of Somalia since a coalition of Islamists, promoting a strict adherence to sharia law, announced their militias had taken control of the city last Monday.

Their victory ended the 15-year rule of the warlords—a motley bunch of armed businessmen, gangsters, and militia leaders.

The two sides had fought a series of bloody battles since February, when the warlords organized themselves into the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism.

They were accused of receiving covert US support and in turn accused the Islamists of sheltering Al Qaeda suspects.

Whatever the truth, the victory of the Islamists sent shock waves



The Bakara market is also a thriving hub of money-making activities.

through Western capitals and drew comparisons with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Such comparisons are difficult to pin on Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, chairman of the Union of Islamic Courts. Speaking at his ramshackle headquarters, he says the courts' mission was simply to pacify Mogadishu. "We have to know first what people want. The last 16 years there was civil war and people are very poor," he says as gently as he can in the harsh, consonant-heavy Somali tongue. "Our only priority is to bring peace. Anything else will come later."

But the media-savvy comments do not sit comfortably alongside the actions of the courts.

Last month, a 16-year-old boy was empowered by the courts to publicly stab to death the man who murdered his father. Dozens of cinemas have been shut down for allegedly showing lewd movies.

Sheikh Ahmed dismisses allegations that his courts are sheltering Al Qaeda suspects.

"That is a claim brought by the warlords only so they can get money. I don't know of any [Al Qaeda fighters] anywhere," he says.

The Islamic courts were set up in the mid-1990s by businessmen keen to bring a degree of law and order to the city.

Monitoring Group, the Islamic courts are able to generate huge revenues in the form of donations from their members' interests in the country's lucrative telecoms and remittance industries.

The report gives further details of roadblocks mounted by the courts to extort money. One is described as collecting more than \$350,000 per year from donkey carts and trucks.

The result is a military machine that has emerged as a real threat to the transitional government, says the report.

The US State Department has long feared that Somalia — with no central security apparatus and where visitors don't even need a visa — could become a safe haven for Al Qaeda.

David Shinn, adjunct professor at Georgetown University and former ambassador to Ethiopia, says the US was right to be concerned about Al Qaeda, but that these Islamists may not seek to harbor anti-Western terrorists.

"My guess is that the vast majority of people in [the US government] are very concerned about the sharia courts in a very negative way, probably excessively so, as there is a tendency to take all Islamic groups as hostile to US interests," he said by telephone from Washington.

Suleiman Baldo, Africa program director at the International Crisis Group, says the moderate Islamists have been weakened, and the radicals emboldened, by the allegations of US support for warlords.

Who will emerge the stronger, he added, remains to be seen.

"We will have to see what happens, but my expectation is that in order for the courts to consolidate their position, they will want to compromise and to be inclusive rather than pursue the path of radicalization," he says.

The scars of the long and bitter war are everywhere. This tank has been lying in the middle of a residential district for 14 years and has become a children's plaything.

Among the more hard-line elements of the courts is Sheikh Mohamed Siyad. "We are Muslims and must work at implementing Koranic law — democracy will not work," he says.

Islamist leaders entered talks with the transitional government last week. But hopes of a deal were dashed at the weekend as the Islamists broke off contact in protest at government plans to invite international peacekeepers into Somalia.

It leaves a transitional government in control of little more than a town, while the Islamists have the capital and a large and growing swath of Somalia.

Meanwhile, the US has set up what it calls a Somalia Contact Group to devise strategy. Its first meeting is in New York Thursday, and it is seen by many as a tacit admission that its previous policy of supporting the warlords was not working.

None of this seems to matter to the residents of Mogadishu, who have been able to move freely around the city for the first time in years. For many here that is enough to suggest the Islamists are the good guys.

"We don't believe they are like the Taliban," says Ahmed Mohamed Wasuge, who owns a hardware shop. "At the moment the sharia courts are working for us and have brought peace and security, which all the communities of Mogadishu welcome."



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Editorial

Dances with turkeys

Harry der Nederlanden

After winding through some rather dense woods where dense canopies keep undergrowth to a minimum, the trail drops at a steep angle into a deep ravine. Turning and skirting the creek at the bottom of the ravine, the trail is overhung by tall maples on the steep slopes on either side. The trees create a green tunnel, making the shadows even deeper. After crossing the winding stream a couple of times, the trail opens out and suddenly the canopy of shade retracts. The sun streams through and the forest floor is ablaze with several shades of purple. Waves of purple, pink and white phlox spill onto the trail from both sides, their colors dazzling my eyes accustomed to nothing but green.

When you come upon wildflowers unexpectedly on a hike in the woods, however lowly their pedigree, they are vastly more dramatic than the richest hybrids nurtured in your back yard. The profusion of purples that suddenly exploded into the middle of my hike almost made me laugh aloud in glee.

It is extremely satisfying, no doubt, for a gardener to see first his daffodils, then his tulips, irises, peonies, primulas, lupines, hollyhocks and geraniums push up out of the ground and burst into bloom in their appointed places and at their appointed times. The gardener feels a little like the conductor of a symphony who signals first the violins and the violas, then the woodwinds, the trumpets and the percussion to each do their part in bringing to life the work in its entirety. His garden is a symphony of colors and textures and shapes, and it has all come to bloom under his direction. It is a work of art in which he can take pride. And when his friends and neighbors come to walk in his garden and marvel at the sight, he swells with delight.

But to me coming upon wildflowers unexpectedly in the woods is even more uplifting. It is wholly and completely a gift. A surprise. Like the Kingdom of Heaven.

Some time later, having left the trail, I was wading through a large field of grasses that grew almost to my shoulders in places. Having those stalks and heavy heads whipping at you is better than swimming, especially since I can't swim. The breezes made the tall grasses ripple and flow as if the Holy Spirit were playing over them. Ever

notice the beautiful regularity of those ripples undulating across the surface? I bet you could write a mathematical formula for their movement. Or perhaps you could score it – like the music for “A Thousand Strings.”

After a while the grasses catching at my feet begin to tire me out and I swerve to the edge of the field where the grass is shorter and thinner and the going a bit easier. Then the grass gives way to a large patch of wild strawberries tiny as droplets of blood, and as I stand there gazing, suddenly through my field of vision – cheep, cheep, cheep – three fuzzy chicks dart past toward the cover of the nearby bushes. Before I can identify what sort of chicks they are (quail? pheasant? tur...), there's Big Momma – coming straight at me, wings spread wide, long neck extended, wattles shaking and roaring like an angry lion. Well, maybe not roaring, but gobbling furiously sounds a bit tame.

Another surprise – more startling even than the field of purple phlox. Back-pedaling and spreading my hands to plead my innocence, I nearly tumble backward into the grass before her furious charge. Having nearly set me on my butt, she spins contemptuously on her heels and follows her three little ones into the bush. When I recover from my surprise and peer into the woods, there's not a trace of them to be seen.

That's the nature of reality, isn't it: it draws you, whets your appetite, and then it rocks you back on your heels and sometimes even sets you down on your butt. That's the rhythm of things.

I've been reading about the emerging church. It's one of those new labels that give us something to chatter about. It's hard to pin down just what the term refers to, but those who speak for it get much of their identity and appeal from describing the existing churches in largely negative terms – as unimaginative, moribund, mired in outdated practices and dogmatic about the wrong things. Brian McLaren pleads for a more generous orthodoxy not saddled with such rigorous theological categories. He wants to replace either/ors with both/ands. Much of it is reminiscent of the counter-cultural church of the 70's but today it is called postmodern.

Discussions about the emergent church quickly polarize into defenders of the traditional church and traditional theology versus those who are excited by the promise of the new and the experimental. The defenders are right, of course, that the mirror held up to the traditional church (there are so many distinct traditions) are invariably caricatures. Where the emergent spokesmen see dead formalism, they see vital, life-giving traditions. If we allow everything to dissolve into this crucible of change, if all traditions and certitudes are in flux, they cry, what happens to the identity of the church? What will we stand for? How can we make a difference? Where do we draw the line?

We're all acutely aware that the world is changing and that change is coming at an ever-accelerating rate. Among us there are those who urge that we must change with it if we are to speak meaningfully to our time. At the same time, there are those who argue no less cogently and urgently that if we keep accommodating to these currents of change, we will have nothing to say. The church is in danger of becoming nothing more than the echo of the world, echoing back its latest nostrums about gender, race, equality and justice with a sacred resonance added. “Look at us!” the clergy cry. “We're good people, concerned about the same things that concern you – but we're religious about it.”

And as the world turns the wild things take root,

are carefully cultivated and over time become the new orthodoxies and rituals – until the next wave of reform and renewal comes around. The wind blows across the fields of grass, the grasses bend and ripple with the liquidity of water as the supple stalks spring upright again. Is all that movement chaos – or is it a dance?

When I was a college student, I was often struck by the inanity of the courses and the curriculum that I was compelled to study. In the biology course that was part of the science requirement we had to memorize genus, species, phylums and sub-phylums. Names upon names, all in Latin. We used to joke that three weeks after the final exam our minds would have been washed clean of this grand edifice of empty words. But that's not true of all of us, of course. Some will have built upon that edifice and made it concrete, filled it out, deepened and extended it.

In the English survey courses we rushed through hundred of poems and stories and memorized the titles and the names of authors so we could match them up in multiple-choice tests. In history and philosophy courses we tore through vast eras at 200 miles per hour, taking snapshots from an altitude of 5000 feet. We read ten pages of Jean-Paul Sartre, learned to stick the label of existentialism on him and thought, “There, we've dealt with that!”

At times I had to escape from it. Instead of opening up new worlds, the frenetic pace of the courses and the superficial way we dealt with things felt suffocating. I'd find some book that had whetted my appetite and skip classes for a few days so I could think for myself and read at my own pace. It was the 60's, remember, so you could get away with it.

Nowadays educators talk about individualized instruction, of course. But their task remains to construct a curriculum that will carry everyone step by step at a more or less coordinated pace through this vast accumulation of information and thought that is our cultural capital. Our scientific and technological society depends upon this huge network of educational institutions to keep cranking out the people trained to keep it all going at breakneck speed.

Every now and again our society also brings forth critics who step outside the system and ask us: does it all make any sense? What are we doing? Where are we going? Look around: the world is going to pot, the poor are wasting away and the rich are going mad and the very air, earth and water of the globe are testifying against us!

Generation after generation rises up, tending the soil, designing their gardens, building walls and fences on the foundations of those who have come before. It's the way of the world. It's history and tradition. That's the way human beings prosper and progress.

But one generation also turns on what the previous generation passes along and suddenly cries, “Enough!” Door and windows are thrown open, walls are knocked down, precious things are carelessly tossed aside or broken to pieces.

There is attraction and repulsion, a rhythm in the world. The wilderness calls us with its surprises. We bring home the flowers and cultivate them, hybridize them, plant them in geometric patterns. And then we throw down our tools and escape into the woods. But even there we are not always welcomed with open arms. Sometimes we dance with turkeys.

The wind blows and ripples the grass and we hear the rustle and the whisper of all that moves and breathes toward a greater end.

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Letters

CRC and First Toronto

Will CRC encourage pastoral ministry with same-gender couples?

Articles from Gerald Vandezande are for me considered "a must read." Most of us probably appreciate his work that includes close ties with our government.

After reading his article carefully I get the feeling that his close relationship with both the church and the government has placed him between a rock and a hard place. And that can never be a comfortable position. We need to pray a lot for people in those positions.

In his article he seems to plead with synod to make his task a bit lighter. He questions the wisdom of putting so much weight on guidelines and advice from synod. So far synod has upheld that homosexual relationships are not acceptable if we want to serve God. This is at least how I have translated synods guidelines or advice or whatever we call it.

We can all agree that all of us need to be forgiven and we all fail in many ways. But does the Bible tell us that we can keep sinning because we are forgiven anyway?

We probably are never able to understand the feelings and needs of our homosexual sisters and brothers. And as a church we have fallen short in embracing those who long for love and understanding. But does that mean that the church may tell them that it is good to give in to their desires? Does the Bible tell us that there is room for a sexual relationship other than between a

man and woman as a married couple? And if we refuse to listen to that, can we not see the devastating results from sexual activity outside marriage?

When Steven Lewis spoke last winter in our community, he told us that when AIDS showed up in the gay communities they thought that it was a gay disease. They never thought that they had to deal with infected children or even babies; now whole populations in Africa are dying.

What else do we have to go through before we understand the Lord's will?

In that light it sounds very hollow to me to plead to be followers of Christ in a Spirit-filled, hope-giving, life-affirming, peaceful way of life. Or does that only apply when we have to deal with same gender couples? Of course someone will argue that this has nothing to do with committed same gender couples.

It will be very hard for First Toronto to make the right decision – only the Holy Spirit can give us insight. And also for the delegates to synod. They need all our prayers.

And for Gerald Vandezande, I realize how hard it must be to witness to unbelievers. But can we get away with only pointing to the love of Christ?

Do we not also have to show in a loving way how the world suffers from disobeying God? We all can only humbly ask for God's help.

Hans Katerberg
Gowanstown.

Wasn't that cartoon of Morales demeaning?

Allow us to comment on two articles in the May 29, 2006 issue of *Christian Courier*.

First, the front-page headline – "Bolivia nationalizes gas & oil industries as South America turns left." Was it fair to use the word "left" when you know its negative connotations? However, what really turned us off was the cartoon of a stereotypical indigenous South American holding a branch and carrying a (the?) hammer and sickle. Was that necessary?

Since one cannot always tell a book by its cover, we did read the article and were pleasantly surprised that you tried to be objective and that your sympathy seemed to come down on the side of the indigenous and native Bolivians. After all, if Albertans have sole claim to their natural resources, then why not the Bolivians.

Seen that way, then, would it not have been better to say that Bolivia is turning to the right?

Second, the article on the Farel Seminary refers to the Reformed Evangelical Alliance. Isn't that a contradiction in terms? What we find more disturbing is the stated fact that "only 0.5 percent of Quebec's population is Evangelical Christian....making French-speaking Canada one of the most under evangelized areas in the world!" Just what is implied here? That we make every effort to evangelize (whatever that means) the overwhelming Roman Catholic majority of French-speaking Canadians? How that blurb ever found space in your paper is a

mystery to us.

We miss Bert Hielema, but continue to appreciate *C.C.*

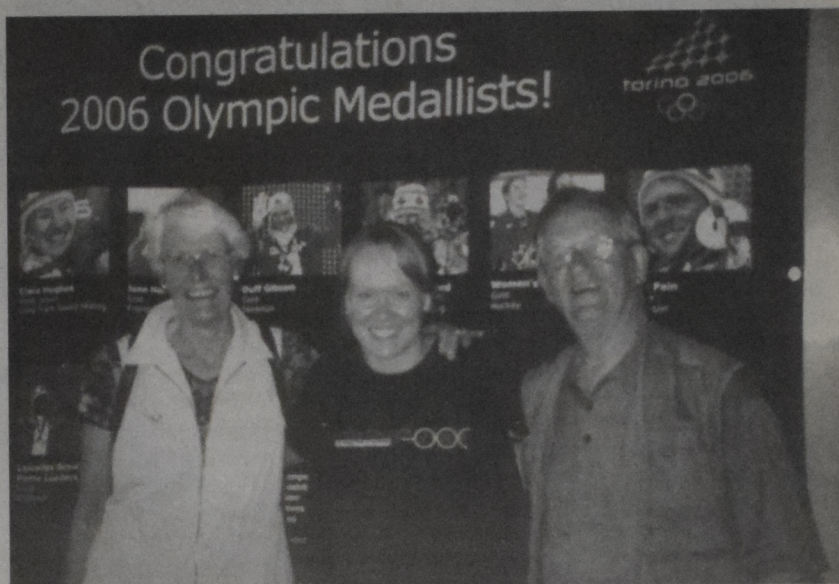
Lippe and Ena de Haan

Thanks for your letter. Actually, the cartoon on the front was done by a Latin American cartoonist. It is no doubt stereo-typical (most cartoons are) but it is a caricature that looks like Evo Morales, who is an indigenous person – and who exploited that identity to the hilt when he ran for office, sometimes dressing in the traditional dress of his people. He is carrying the hammer and sickle on his back to symbolize his use of leftist ideology – but with a difference, hence he is also carrying the green sprig, which is at one and the same time a symbol of peace and hope (like the dove carrying the olive leaf) and a symbol of the coca plant, from which cocaine is manufactured, and which his followers adopted as a symbol of their culture as well as of their opposition to the American "war on drugs."

I thought it a clever cartoon because it brought together so many themes. Yes, it uses stereotypes, but it was not seen as demeaning in Bolivia.

As to the article on Farel Seminary, I apologize: I should have put that line in quotation marks. It came from their website, and it struck my eye as it did yours, but I should have put quotation marks around it to signal that it was their phrase.

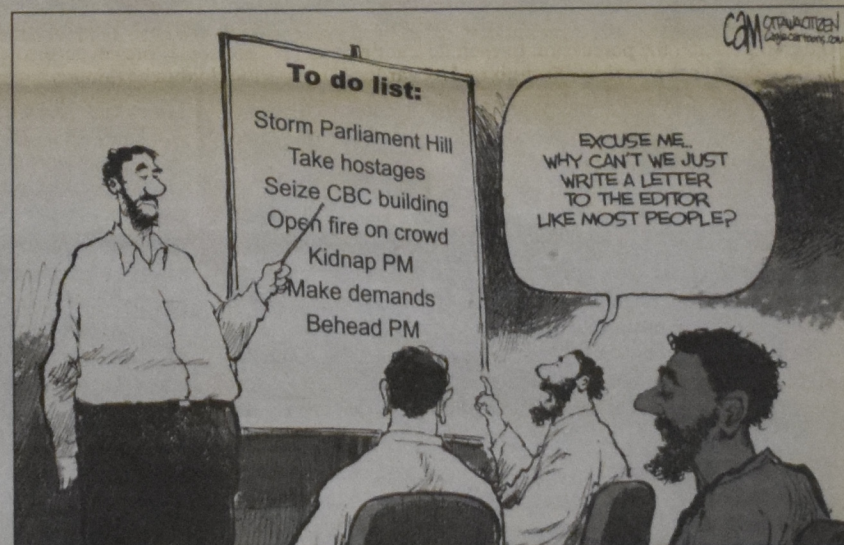
Thanks again, Harry



A surprise awaited former *CC* staffers Stan and Corrie de Jong on their visit to the Olympic Oval in Calgary, Alberta in May.

Disappointed upon learning that there was no ice at the Oval, they were suddenly introduced to Canada's Gold Medal speed skater Cindy Klassen. Cindy graciously agreed to pose for a picture. Her training goes on, it seems, ice or no ice.

Readers may want to look up "cindy klassen" on the internet, then scroll down to the item that reads: "Cindy Klassen speeding for His sake." You'll appreciate learning more about this fine Christian woman.



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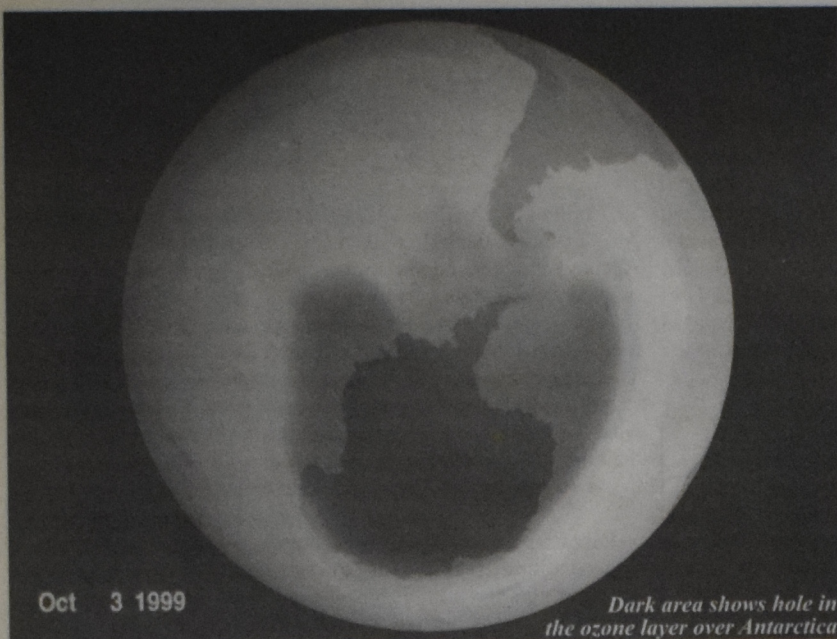
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Beauty/Earthkeeping



Oct 3 1999

Dark area shows hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica

Earth's ozone shield is poised for recovery

Peter N. Spotts

Earth's sunscreen appears poised for recovery after decades of assault from man-made chemicals.

After years of decline, global concentrations of ozone in a key region of the stratosphere have held steady for the past eight to nine years, according to two new, independent studies.

Scientists noted initial signs of this trend three years ago. But these latest efforts

benefit from an additional three years of measurements. And they appear to be the first to specifically attribute the changes to the Montreal Protocol, a 1987 international treaty that phased out key chemicals known to destroy ozone.

Although a range of man-made gases can deplete ozone, the main targets so far have been chlorine-carrying compounds used as coolants in refrigerators and for fighting fires.

"It's clear that the Montreal Protocol has reduced the total amount of chlorine entering the atmosphere," notes Derek Cunnold, an atmospheric scientist at Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta and a member of one of the two research teams. Those reductions, he continues, should first arrest the decline, then allow the ozone layer to rebuild.

"We are now seeing that kind of a response," he says, referring to the stabilization of ozone levels.

Ozone concentrations are still quite low and are allowing historically high levels of damaging ultraviolet light to reach Earth's surface, researchers caution. Moreover, once the upswing begins, a recovery is likely to come only in fits and starts over 50 to 60 years. And scientists say it's highly uncertain whether the effort will overshoot or undershoot the protocol's target of returning stratospheric ozone concentrations to pre-1980 levels.

Global warming is expected to present ozone with a far different environment than the one that existed before 1980. Several factors — changing circulation patterns, temperatures, and the rise or fall of methane, nitrous oxides, and water vapor reaching the stratosphere — will affect the outcome.

Still, "we're on the cusp" of recovery, says Elizabeth Weatherhead, a researcher at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado at Boulder and the lead author of the second study. She and colleague Signe Andersen published their review of the data in the May 4 edition of the journal *Nature*. Dr. Cunnold and his colleagues are publishing their results in an upcoming edition of the *Journal of Geophysical Research*.

Ozone is an atmospheric Janus. Made up of three oxygen atoms, ozone at ground level can trigger bad air days in urban areas across the planet. But in the stratosphere, ozone intercepts ultraviolet light from the sun, reducing the amount that reaches Earth's surface.

Both studies rely on ground-based and satellite measurements of ozone for trends, and to varying degrees on computer

Beauty will save the world

There is an ancient triad that was once considered to be the goal of education: the True, the Good and the Beautiful. As I consider the three, I suspect that in our tradition we have spent volumes of time and effort on the first, often been preoccupied with arguments about the second, but have barely glanced at the third. Truth is sought in our doctrines and philosophies, goodness has been the goal of our moral and ethical debates, but beauty, beauty is more often than not iconoclastically viewed as the extra, the luxury — a peripheral consideration.

As Christians, we like to get things right. We like to do good things. We are a thinking people and a practical people. So when it comes to expressing our faith to those who do not know the song, we have spent much time and energy trying to rationally defend the faith against the unbelievers (conservative apologetics) and rationalize the faith to the cultured despisers (liberal contextualization). These are worthy pursuits, given the right circumstance, but both engage only the head in an effort to convince. We need to creatively explore ways that engage the heart, and that means celebrating images, metaphors, allegory, symbols, and song.

The beauty of charity

In his novel, *The Idiot*, Dostoyevsky suggests that "beauty will save the world." Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech of the same title, tries to unpack the writer's phrase. He suggests that

perhaps that old trinity of Truth, Good, and Beauty is not just the formal outworn formula... If the crests of these three trees join together... and if the too obvious, too straight branches of Truth and Good are crushed or amputated and cannot reach the light — yet perhaps the whimsical, unpredictable, unexpected branches of Beauty will make their way through and soar up to that very place and in this way perform the work of all three.

In other words, while we may feel we have some mastery of truth or virtue, beauty always dances out of reach, touching us and moving us toward God in a way that is often more mysterious.

I'm speaking of the highest beauty, the beauty that names the sham of all cheap beauties, the beauty that makes your heart leap or a tear slip from your eye.

Some say Dostoyevsky was ultimately pointing at the beauty of a life of mercy, a life that enters through love into the pain and brokenness of others. In other words, the beauty that saves

the world is nothing less than the Christ, in whom all truth and goodness dwell.

We sing "Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer than all the angels in the sky," but I wonder if we believe it only in a sentimental way. David Bentley Hart has written a heavy book entitled *The Beauty of the Infinite: the Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (2003). In it he declares that Christ's beauty goes deep:

Christian theology has no stake in the myth of disinterested rationality; the church has no arguments for its faith more convincing than the form of Christ.... What Christian thought offers the world is not a set of 'rational' arguments that (suppressing certain of their premises) force assent from others by leaving them, like the interlocutors of Socrates, at a loss for words; rather, it stands before the world principally with the story it tells concerning God and creation, the form of Christ, the loveliness of the practice of Christian charity — and the rhetorical richness of its idiom. Making its appeal first to the eye and heart, as the only way it may 'command' assent, the church cannot separate truth from rhetoric, or from beauty.

There is something attractive to the heart in the story of Jesus Christ, and it can stand on its own without rational apologetic or modern contextual maneuvering. He "had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53.2b) and yet this suffering servant is the most beautiful example of self-giving love that we know.

Our contemporary culture rampantly pursues the aesthetic side of life — that part that engages the senses, pursues the delight of attractive things. Movies and music, fast food and fantasy, gizmos and gadgets, the cult of the body and youth — as crass as some of it may be, these are all evidence of a culture in pursuit of beauty. This is why the imaginative worlds of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia* are so popular. They tap into these impulses of the heart, which are reaching out for a glory, a glory that is ultimately found in the self-giving love of Christ. The beauty of our songs, preaching, communion, and service flow out from his Spirit and are reason enough. To paraphrase Pascal, beauty has reasons that reason can never know.

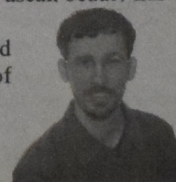
These three remain: truth, goodness, and beauty. But for these times, the greatest of these is beauty.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



Stewardship

Big picture stewardship 2

Canadian government spending

Last issue, we looked at the average Canadian's income and spending. In this issue, we'll look at our Federal Government's spending using data provided by Statistics Canada – CANSIM Table 380-0034. This table had over 300 categories that I reduced by grouping many of them. I calculated the percentages and then listed them in descending order as they appear in the table below.

2005 Federal Government Income and Expenditure (in Millions of \$)		
Total Income	225076	%
Income taxes	104476	46.4
GST	35803	15.9
Business taxes	34288	15.2
Contributions to Employment Ins.	17464	7.8
Income -Government business	7300	3.2
Gas/Fuel taxes	4791	2.1
Others- grouped	20954	9.3
Total Outlay	219915	%
Transfers to Provincial Governments	53674	24.4
Goods & Services - non defence	37815	17.2
Interest on Public Debt	31428	14.3
Old age security payments	29063	13.2
Goods & Services - Defence	13449	6.1
Employment Ins. Benefits	12937	5.9
Child tax benefit	9173	4.2
Contributions and Aid	3774	1.7
Transfers to non-agriculture business	2455	1.1
Transfers to agriculture business	2391	1.1
Transfers to Universities	2227	1.0
Others - grouped	21529	9.8
Surplus-Deficit	5161	

Looking at income, we note that in 2005 our government received just over \$225 billion and most of it came out of our pockets by way of taxes: income tax 46.4 per cent, GST 15.9%, and gas/fuel taxes 3.2%. In addition, our government collected another 7.8% of its revenue by way of our employment insurance contributions. In comparison to what was collected directly from us, our businesses contributed 15.2% by way of their taxes. Our Crown Corporations and our Government's investments earned \$7.3 billion (3.2% of the Government's income).

On the expenditure side, our Government expended just over \$219 billion; mostly on programs that benefit Canadians. Only

depleting chemicals isn't over.

Production of another potent ozone-eater – methyl bromide – initially was to have ended in 2000. Farmers use the compound as a fumigant and the Environmental Protection Agency continues to grant waivers for its production and use in the US.

Peter N. Spotts is a writer for The Christian Science Monitor

Ozzy Ozone is used to teach kids about ozone



Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

\$3.7 billion (1.7%) is listed as going outside of Canada through Aid – mainly through CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) and bilateral aid. Embarrassingly paltry in comparison to what we spend on ourselves.

A particular sore point is the amount that the Government pays out to service our debt: \$31.4 billion or 14.3% of expenditures. This means that more than 14 cents out of every dollar raised is spent on interest to service our Federal debt. That is on top of what our Provincial Governments (except Alberta) pay to service their debts. This is also more than what the Government pays out to our seniors in Old Age Security payments (13.2%).

It is also interesting to note that our Government's expenditure on agricultural subsidies in 2005 is almost the same as that spent on non-agricultural businesses. If we consider what our government earns from its own businesses and investments, we can see that it easily offsets the cost of the subsidies for both categories of businesses. In the recent budget, the expenditures on both agriculture (another \$1 billion) and defense show a large increase.

As Christian stewards, we are concerned that our country's debt has been racked up over the last decade or more. When it comes to dealing with poverty, we are concerned about the relatively small amount of expenditure on International Aid. In so many ways, our Stewardship record is a very selfish one. The best antidote to selfishness is giving – giving that does not directly benefit us. It is something that should concern us, and motivate us to encourage our Government to increase its expenditures in this area.

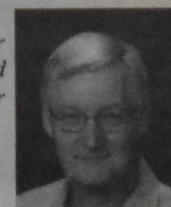
Stewardly tip: Darfur. Petition our Government to increase its funding for Aid through CIDA – Aid for the poor, the victims of injustice, the displaced and persecuted millions in Darfur and other places. Countries like Denmark and even the Netherlands are much more generous with aid; yet we have been blessed with a lot more resources than either of them!

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Earthkeeping

[Our apologies, but we messed up on the order of the columns. This one should have followed "Big Picture 1" instead of "Hospitality". Our mistake. – Editor]

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario
Rick's email: rickd@cssservices.ca



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Church

Bolivia proposes constitutional revision that would remove Catholic Church from privileged status

LA PAZ, Bolivia (ALC). Several political parties and citizen groups proposed that the new Bolivian constitution modify the exclusive state recognition of the Catholic religion, an issue that is being addressed by the majority evangelical citizen group called National Unity (CN for its initials in Spanish).

"One of the central objectives is to propose religious freedom in the country and eliminate the privileges of the Catholic Church as the official State religion," CN candidate Manuel Morales told the daily *La Razon*.

The CN proposal is to move from a confessional State to a lay state, said the Pastor of Ekklesia, Alberto Salcedo, who said that the priority demand of the movement is based on the "struggle for life, for equality and for dignity."

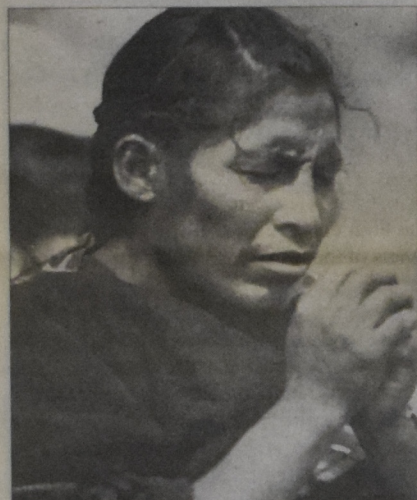
In CN, 90 percent of the representatives are from Evangelical Christian Churches, as well as left wing groups and religious communities.

The ruling party Movement to Socialism (MAS) supports the argument. On the other hand, the group Democratic and Social Power thinks that the constitutional text should remain the same and National Unity supports the position of the Bolivian Episcopal Conference, which admits religious freedom but with an expressed recognition of the Catholic Church. According to *La Razon*, the Bolivian Catholic Church has voiced its opinion prior to the debate as last May the bishops published a message where they said that reviewing article 3 of the Constitution would be opportune to "remove the doubts and often the prejudices that certain sectors of the population have manifested regarding the current text."

Article 3 sustains that the "State recognizes that sustains the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion. It guarantees the public exercise of all other religions. Relations with this Church will be governed through concordats and agreements between the State and the Holy See."

Francisco Flores, adjunct secretary general of the Bolivian Bishop's Conference said that the position of the Catholic Church is to go to "broad religious freedom." However, he said, the country "should recognize the Catholic Church and perhaps other religions as part of the history of the formation of Bolivia."

The proposal of the MAS does not contemplate this recognition in its Constitutional project. Rather it seeks to ensure a lay state and freedom of worship.



An Aymara woman praying in Bolivia

US Anglicans gather for national meeting amid gay bishop controversy

Chris Herlinger

New York (ENI) – The Episcopal Church USA is holding its triennial convention in Columbus, Ohio, where the US branch of the worldwide Anglican Communion is grappling with two issues that have animated the life of the denomination in recent years: sexuality and church authority.

"We're wrestling with deep questions about identity and authority in a global family of churches made up of incredible differences," said the Rev. Ian Douglas, a professor of mission and global Christianity at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Overshadowing the June 13-21 gathering is a concern that some members may leave the 2.3-million-member denomination because of disagreements regarding sexual issues, particularly the 2003 consecration of openly-gay V. Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire.

Robinson's consecration as bishop set off a firestorm of protest from opponents within

the denomination as well as from other clerics in the Anglican Communion, many from Africa and Asia, who want the global body to distance itself from the church.

Still, Douglas said he felt the recent debates had helped the Episcopal Church.

"It has focused [us] on what it means to be an Anglican in the world today," Douglas told Ecumenical News International.

For his part, Frank T. Griswold, the denomination's retiring presiding bishop, has said he doubts a walkout or a formal schism within the Episcopal Church is likely to occur.

"Every convention has had hovering over it a catastrophic fantasy," Griswold told The New York Times newspaper. "And then you get to general convention and people listen to each other carefully. At the end of the day, you usually come out in a place that represents what I call the diverse centre of the church."

Polish church faces new claims about communist-era informers

Jonathan Luxmoore

Warsaw (ENI) – A Polish bishop has stated that many Roman Catholic clerics were approached as potential agents by the former communist regime, following allegations that a friend of the late Pope John Paul II had been an informer for the secret police.

"The secret services of communist Poland made contact with at least 95 per cent of priests," said Jan Szkodon, auxiliary bishop of Krakow in southern Poland.

"They simply came to everyone who was building a church or exercising some church function," Szkodon told Poland's Catholic information agency KAI on June 7. "What they wrote in their reports is another matter. But everyone who went and returned from abroad had talks with SB [Sluzba Bezpieczenstwa, or secret police] employees when they obtained their passport."

The bishop had earlier presented a report on communist-era infiltration of the church in the southern archdiocese to its archbishop, Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz. The cardinal would decide whether to publish the report, Szkodon said.

The report was completed a week after a Polish Roman Catholic weekly, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, alleged that the Rev. Mieczyslaw Malinski, an 83-year-old priest closely associated with John Paul II, was a former SB agent with the code name "Delta".

In an interview with the *Rzeczpospolita* daily newspaper, Malinski admitted having talks with SB officials but strongly denied being an agent.

About one in ten Roman Catholic clergy are believed to have acted as informers in communist-ruled Poland.

Poland's Catholic bishops' conference in March requested "mercy and forgiveness" for priests who had been informers, and condemned "media sensations" about the issue.

Bishop Szkodon said a "sense of proportion" was required. "A public apology shouldn't be demanded in every case, since the degree of involvement in evil varied," he said. "We need humble sincerity so as not to deny the sins of the past, while also not throwing accusations around lightly without real proof and without taking account of the conditions of the time."

Archbishop of Canterbury seeks suspension of Harare bishop

Trevor Grundy

Canterbury, England (ENI) – The Archbishop of Canterbury has intervened in the controversy surrounding Zimbabwean Anglican Bishop Nolbert Kunonga, suggesting the bishop should be suspended until allegations against him have been dealt with.

Kunonga, the bishop of Harare, was embroiled in a dispute that led to an ecclesiastical court being convened in August 2005 after an investigation into charges including incitement to murder. But the trial ended the following day when the presiding judge withdrew from the case before a plea had been returned.

"In the context of a prolonged and political crisis, the diocese of Harare faces intolerable strain in the form of the very grave and unresolved accusations against Bishop Kunonga," said a statement issued June 14 by Lambeth Palace, the London office of Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

It continued, "In other jurisdictions, a priest or bishop facing such serious charges would be suspended without prejudice until the case had been closed. It is therefore very difficult for Bishop Kunonga to be regarded as capable of functioning as a bishop elsewhere in the communion."

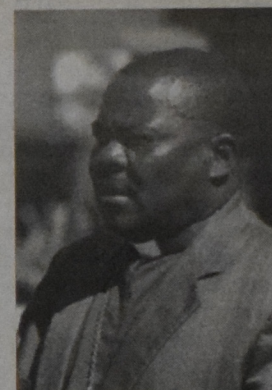
Kunonga has given public support on repeated occasions to Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe. His pronouncements have divided Anglicans in the southern African country, many of whom see the bishop as condoning violence committed against opponents of Mugabe's ruling Zanu-PF party.

The Lambeth Palace statement noted, "The Archbishop of Canterbury has pressed the authorities of the province [church] to bring the case to a conclusion in a way consistent with justice, transparency and truth so that the damage to the health and the credibility of the church can be addressed."

In May, a group of Zimbabwean priests exiled in Britain said they planned to approach the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, to act as a mediator between warring factions of Harare's Anglican church.

Kunonga has told reporters he is not answerable to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who has no power to intervene directly in the affairs of the church in Zimbabwe.

"Throughout history, the Anglican Church has been an extension of British colonialism and imperialism," Kunonga told the state-owned Herald daily newspaper in Harare recently. "England has no jurisdiction over me."



Bishop Nolbert Kunonga

Church



Woman on way to town, Rajasthan, India

Local leader in India threatens Christians after rapes

Vishal Arora

NEW DELHI (Compass Direct) – The headman of 12 villages in Madhya Pradesh state, including Nadia village where two Christian women were raped on May 28, has asked Christians to renounce their faith or leave the village, a local source said.

Pandya Patel sent two representatives to Nadia village on June 6 to ask the Christians to give up their faith or leave immediately – without any of their belongings.

“Patel also warned other villagers that if anyone spoke to the police about himself or about the rapists, they would be expelled from the village – regardless of their religious background,” the source, who requested anonymity, told Compass.

He said villagers are angry about the rape.

The total population of the 12 villages is approximately 10,000, of which fewer than 100 are Christians.

To counteract sympathy for the Christian families of Nadia village, Patel claimed missionaries were offering motorbikes and jobs to Hindus to lure them to Christianity.

“In reality, Christians in these villages have been facing intimidation, threats and violence for the last three years,” one villager explained. “In 2003, three Christian families in Nadia village were fined a total of 14,000 rupees (US\$304) for becoming Christians.”

At press time, police had failed to arrest anyone for the rape. Inspector O.S. Thakur of the Khargone Police Station was unavailable for comment. A policeman, however, confirmed that although the victims had identified the rapists by name, no arrests had been made.

Press conference confrontation

On Monday (June 5), Indira Iyengar, a member of the Madhya Pradesh State Minorities Commission, brought the rape victims to the state capital, Bhopal, to meet the governor. She also arranged a press conference to highlight the incident in the local media.

Members of the Hindu extremist group Bajrang Dal interrupted the press conference and warned Iyengar not to accuse them of attacking Christians. While the extremists vandalized the site, state Bajrang Dal convenor Devender Rawat reportedly told Iyengar, “I will not allow you to tarnish the image of nationalist Hindu organizations.”

The Minorities Commission then served a “show cause” notice to Iyengar, asking her to explain why she should not be removed from office.

Commission chairman Anwar Mohammed Khan said Iyengar had failed to raise the issue with the commission before holding the press conference.

“The chairman has no right to send me a ‘show cause’ notice. I was appointed by the government, which can, if it wants, sack me,” Iyengar told Compass. “As a member of the commission, I have the right to use any platform to bring incidents of violence against the Christian community before the public.”

Climate of impunity

“The situation in Madhya Pradesh is becoming most frustrating,” Dr. John Dayal, a member of the National Integration Council of India, told Compass. “The Madhya Pradesh Minorities Commission should be sacked and the chairman should resign for failing to deal with the increasing incidence of violence against Christians.”

Dayal said the state governor should now act, since the chief minister and other politicians had failed to do so. As a representative of the president and the Union of India, the governor is responsible for ensuring that constitutional guarantees of religious freedom are implemented in the state, he said.

“I am also amazed at the silence of human rights and civil society groups in the state who seem to be taking this matter lightly – as if the minorities were a worthless commodity,” he added.

Christians in India fear secret surveys of churches

Vishal Arora

NEW DELHI (Compass Direct) – Preparation of a “data bank of churches and missionary organizations” by police in Rajasthan state’s Udaipur district has heightened fears of renewed harassment among the state’s minuscule Christian community.

Christians in Rajasthan, ruled by the Hindu extremist-backed Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have documented a systematic campaign of persecution at the hands of the state government over the past four months.

Compass has obtained a copy of the questionnaire, which asks the “ideology of the priest of the church or the head of the organization,” and whether the “character of the priest or head has been verified earlier.”

The questionnaire also seeks a detailed description of the activities of Christian institutions, their sources of income and financial aid, legal status, fixed assets, and information on residents of any hostel facilities they may run. It also asks if they provide education and whether they are registered to do so.

“The tone and tenor of the questionnaire is as if it were aimed at illegal immigrants,” Sajan George, national convenor of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), told Compass. “The survey’s content violates basic human rights and equality assured to all citizens by the constitution of India,” he added.

The survey asks for the addresses of the Christian institutions – and the names of the police stations with jurisdiction over those locations. It asks not only for the names, ages and addresses of the institution leaders, but their fathers’ names. The questionnaire, which is in Hindi, also provides a column for relevant pictures.

“About 10 days ago, police came to us with a questionnaire and took all the details concerning our institution,” a top Christian leader in Udaipur, who requested anonymity, told Compass.

But when Compass spoke to Rajasthan state Home Minister Gulab Chand Kataria of the BJP and concerned officials of Udaipur district, they denied ordering the questionnaire.

“No such survey is underway, and we are not collecting any data on Christians,” Kataria said.

Udaipur district Superintendent of Police M.N. Dinesh said, “Our police are not collecting any data on Christians. I have not given any such orders.”

Vijendra Jala, additional superintendent of police, said the district sometimes does conduct routine surveys for security

purposes, but he denied knowing anything about the survey of Christians.

The survey follows an anti-conversion bill passed by the state assembly on April 7, which would provide the same pretext for jailing Christians for “forcible conversion” that such legislation has produced in other states in India; the Rajasthan governor refused to sign the bill. The survey also comes on the heels of a multi-pronged attack on Emmanuel Missions International, based in Kota district, over the last four months.

“We fear that the attempt is to identify and target church congregations by the Sangh Parivar [organizations affiliated with the Hindu extremist RSS, or Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] in active connivance with the state machinery,” George said. “A similar survey was held in Gujarat.”

A survey focusing on only one religious community is illegal and does not come under the jurisdiction of government census officers or the Home Ministry’s foreign contribution regulation department.

There they go again

When the Gujarat state government undertook a similar survey in the wake of anti-Christian violence in Dangs district in 1999, the high court ruled that it was against the tenets of the India Constitution and ordered the government to halt it.

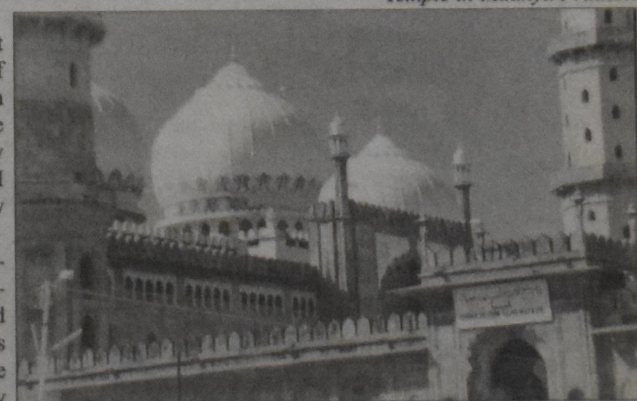
In spite of the order, the Gujarat government conducted three more surveys. It tried to collect data on Christians once in 2001 and twice in 2003 as a build-up to an anti-conversion bill that was passed in the state assembly on March 25, 2003.

Each time, the BJP government initially denied having given any instructions to the police for the surveys but later acknowledged it, saying they were part of investigations of Christians.

Udaipur division, which includes Udaipur district and the neighboring Banswara district, is one of the most religiously sensitive regions in the state. Extremists belonging to the RSS launched two attacks on Catholics in Banswara district during the week before Christmas, in one case beating four people until they were unconscious.

Extremists had earlier threatened to make Banswara district free of all Christians.

Temple in Madhya Pradesh



Mission

Mbudi za ndokotora

Rob Greidanus

After a few months hiatus, the doctor is back on duty! Now that we have finally made the move from Kenya to Namibia, I have deliberately changed the title of my medical letter from 'Gazeti Daktari' (Swahili for doctor's newsletter) to 'Mbudi za Ndokotora' which is Rukwangali for 'news from the doctor' (sounds like, but definitely not, the doctor's 'booty'). Since arriving in Namibia in January, I have devoted the last few months to studying the tribal dialect of Rukwangali, getting to know people in the community, setting up our home in Rundu, and helping to get our children back on track with home schooling. April 3 was my first official day back on the job and I was excited to get to work. It didn't take long to realize that the hospital was very different than anywhere I had worked before. Please allow me to give you an overview of my new work environment.

I was given an introductory tour of this large 350 bed referral hospital on my first morning there. I found it quite dissimilar from the cottage hospital setting of Kapso-war, Kenya and that of rural Canada. The Rundu State hospital serves a population of 250,000; about 80,000 from the town of Rundu and the rest from North-eastern Namibia, Southern Angola, and Western Botswana. Because it is a government hospital, Namibian residents can access medical consults, laboratory work, x-rays, and medicines at low cost. This is a huge benefit for many in the Kavango region that are less privileged financially.

Interestingly, the medical doctors at Rundu State Hospital are even more diverse culturally than the patients they serve. Most of the 18 doctors are from Cuba, the Ukraine, and Russia with the remainder coming from various African countries including Zambia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, and D.R. Congo. Talk about cultural diversity! Sadly, there are no Namibian doctors here. Namibia has no medical school and the few doctors that go outside the country for training (esp. South Africa) tend to stay there or come back to urban practices in Windhoek. I was told that at one time, not so long ago, the medical staff was comprised entirely of South African doctors who provided a high level of care. However, since Namibia's independence from South Africa in 1990, all of them have moved on for political and monetary reasons.

The hospital is divided into the specialty services of Medicine, Pediatrics, Surgery, and Obstetrics/Gynecology. Most of the doctors are general practitioners functioning as consultants. I was appointed as a consultant on the Obstetrics/Gynecology department as this is where the man-power needs are greatest at the present time. With the hospital delivering approximately 2,500 babies per year I should be kept busy. My two other colleagues on this service are from

Cuba and Kenya. The official working language at the hospital is English; although you will hear the doctors speaking in various tongues throughout the day (they must be Pentecostal). Most of the nurses have their roots and training in Namibia, although some have recently been recruited from neighboring African countries. Only a small proportion of the patients speak English fluently, so I am getting lots of opportunity to practice speaking Rukwangali and I am hoping to continue to grow in my proficiency with it.

In my first week, I was pleasantly surprised to discover how well supplied the hospital was (perhaps this is because we just came from Kenya). We have a radiologist and the ability to do plain film x-ray, fluoroscopy, and ultrasound. The hospital is presently trying to obtain a c.t. scanner. We can perform basic laboratory work and microbiology, but other blood tests are sent out to Windhoek and the results come back in a reasonable time. The operating room is unexpectedly well equipped with sutures, instruments, and other essential supplies. Their laparoscope is currently under repair, but they have a functional gastroscope, sigmoidoscope, bronchoscope, and cystoscope – more than I expected for a government hospital. The maternity ward still relies on fetoscopes and the 'ear of faith' to monitor fetal heart tones. They do not have the luxury of hand held dopplers, but do have one electronic fetal monitoring machine on the maternity ward that is used sparingly (although it lacks paper to print out a recording of the baby's heart rate pattern like we would do back in Canada for medical-legal reasons). We do have an old-fashioned vacuum extractor (a rare commodity throughout Africa) which I had the opportunity to use this last week for a baby that was in distress during the latter stages of labor.

The pharmacy is lacking in the cutting edge medicines and antibiotics, but is well supplied with the basics. An anti-retroviral (ARV) program has been running here since 2003 with first and second line generic HIV medicines. This is starting to make a big impact on the referral population, which carries an adult HIV prevalence of more than 20 per cent – staggering! Rapid HIV testing and CD4 counts can be done on site and we have one doctor dedicated exclusively to following the ARV care.

When I started on the Obstetrical/Gynecology service, it soon became evident that HIV/AIDS was a major issue here also. Close to 20 per cent of all pregnant mothers are HIV positive in this community. This means that without counseling and appropriate treatment one-third of their babies will be infected with this deadly virus as well.



Village in Rundu, Namibia

Many of the mothers still do not access the hospital or clinic for prenatal care or delivery which means they are denied the ability to reduce the transmission rate. For ones that do present for medical attention, they are encouraged to be tested for HIV and if positive, go on to have a CD4 count. For economic reasons, only mothers with CD4 counts less than 200 (basically AIDS) are offered HAART (highly affective three drug therapy). This can reduce prenatal transmission rates to less than 5 per cent.

The mothers with counts greater than 200 are given a single dose of Niverapine (an ARV medicine) during labor and then the baby is given a dose of the same drug in the first hours of life. This has been shown to reduce transmission rates to less than 10 per cent in a very cost effective manner.

Unfortunately, there are still many barriers to getting this medicine to the women that need it. Many women refuse to be tested for HIV despite counseling. Even if tested and found to be HIV positive, the patients don't want to take the medicine home for use in early labor because of the stigma associated with it. Frequently, they show up at the hospital late in labor making any preventative measures futile.

Other big issues affecting the Obs/gyne service in this region are promiscuity, STD's, teenage pregnancies and single motherhood. I have been told that women outnumber men in Rundu by 3:1. This is attributed to men having been killed fighting for independence in the last few decades and others moving away looking for work in the big cities. There are many girls and women that are lacking a supportive man in their lives. This, along with a deficiency in decent role models, has led many of them to look for love and acceptance in all the wrong places. Sexually transmitted diseases such as Syphilis, Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and genital condyloma (warts) are seen in the gyne clinic at astronomical rates. (Sorry if describing this grosses some of you out). The sero-prevalence of genital herpes in the adult population in this region has been shown in studies to be 85 per cent – hard to believe! It has also been well-documented that harboring these STDs greatly increases your propensity to acquire HIV when exposed to it.

I have already seen many prenatal patients here in their teens. Last week I saw a 14 and 15 year-old girl respectively that

were pregnant and had next to no family support. Later I saw a 16 year-old expectant mother who was also HIV positive. Seldom is there a male partner in the picture once the pregnancy is revealed. The social and emotional issues run very deep and sadly I realize that my short consultation just scratches the surface on caring for these women in a holistic manner.

You may be interested in knowing what my clinic setting is like when we deal with these complicated and personal medical issues. The hospital greatly lacks space, so when one of us (the three ob/gyn doctors) are not on the wards or in the operating room, all three of us and one nurse share a small consultation room. We all sit around one desk where you can hear three simultaneous (and supposedly confidential) conversations in a mixture of Rukwangali and English. The nurse, and sometimes the other patient in the room, will yell out some translation phrases as we conduct our interview. Then we take turns doing our gynecological examinations on the one and only exam table with just a thin curtain as the barrier to the rest of the room.

This lack of privacy would be entirely unacceptable in Canada, but seems to work out of necessity here. I find it hard to believe that these young Namibian women are willing to tell this strange white doctor anything about the concealed parts of their lives and bodies.

Interestingly, I have observed my colleagues spending a mere 3-4 minutes with each patient during our outpatient consultations. This is partly because of the sheer volume coming through the clinic each day. I find it very difficult to do an adequate job in this amount of time – especially with the sensitive nature of the problems and the language barriers. However, as I try to take a little longer to build rapport, show compassion, and counsel the patients, I get awkward looks from my colleagues. I am praying for wisdom in how to deal with this. I want to pull my weight in the clinic, but need to practice in a manner that honors the patients, supports my ethical conscience, and yet doesn't sacrifice a close working relationship with my new colleagues. A challenge to say the least!

I will close this report with an account of one of my patients seen last week. It typifies some of the unique medical issues in this part of the world. I was called to see a post partum woman that delivered one week earlier and now presented with a four-day history of fever. This 24 year-old mother was HIV positive and on anti-retroviral medicine. On arrival in the emergency department she was semi-conscious, had a high fever, and was in obvious respiratory distress. My initial thoughts were, is this malaria, pneumonia, or some opportunistic infection?

The patient was unable to give much of a history, but the family denied any unexpected bleeding or discharge from the birth

The land



Field Stones

from *Field Stones* by Robert Kinsley

In early spring before the grass greened,
before the tubulars of wind plants took hold,

you could see them clearly scattered in the
stubbled fields my father was about to plow:

field stones, like the caps of old men
worn thin from years in the weather of

farm. Where he sent my brother and me
to hook with pick and shovel those

smooth round forms that could
nick a plow point or tip a wagon

or break the leg of some unsuspecting
cow mid-stride on her way to the barn.

We'd pry up the ones not buried deep,
toss them to the side of the field, and swear

at ones that refused our boyish arms, that sparked
the pick, again and again in their stubborn flash of knowing.

<http://www.wiredforbooks.org/poetry/fieldstones/kinsley.htm>

Mbudi za ndokotora...continued

canal. The initial exam failed to reveal any obvious focus of infection but I deferred the vaginal exam as the history suggested no concerns there. The chest x-ray came back normal and the malaria smear was negative. Her white count was normal (but she was immune compromised with a CD4 of 200). Surprisingly her hemoglobin came back at 3.6 (normal >12) and her indirect bilirubin was elevated.

Her condition was declining, so I repeated my exam including the gyne portion and found a sticky, seedy, and foul smelling substance where nature never intended it to be. When I questioned the family on what it was (as it was different than any physiological discharge I had ever seen), they now volunteered it was a traditional herbal remedy. Over the last week, they had been putting this concoction up her birth canal with a stick. This was allegedly done to speed up her

recovery time. "Why didn't you tell me this earlier?" was my response. No answer was given.

Unfortunately, this home remedy was just a set-up for introducing infection in the womb of this immune compromised lady. It soon became clear that she was suffering from post partum sepsis, which originated in her uterus, and was now having hemolysis (breaking apart her own red blood cells) from the overwhelming infection. I quickly ordered broad spectrum antibiotics and a blood transfusion. Sadly, she deteriorated rapidly before my eyes and died just a few hours later.

I was reminded of the complex issues at play in this tragic loss that are so different than in my Western culture. A young mother who is infected with HIV, receives unconventional and undisclosed traditional treatments at home, and then finally comes to the hospital for help

Life in the cornfield

Farmers are a funny breed. We dream all winter of spring's arrival, only to be stressed out by the work that comes with it. Every year on top of the year round day-to-day routines there's extra work in the yard and fields, and maintenance of machinery and buildings. Jack and I have been farming for more than 27 years. Some jobs are his; some are mine; and some are just a whole lot better when they're shared – like feeding the chickens, or picking the stones off the cornfields in spring.

Every year presents its challenges. Last summer we systematically tile-drained our west field, and that means the stone crop is extra heavy this year. A sudden stretch of warm temperatures in May enabled Jack to plant the corn with relative ease. However, that warm spell was followed by two weeks of cold, wet weather. When conditions finally changed, he needed to ship chickens (as scheduled), pick stones and plant soybeans all at once. We spent Monday together picking stones and made good progress, but when Tuesday dawned warm and bright, Prince Farming needed to plant the soys as soon as possible.

Now if you asked Jack to write an essay on The Virtuous Woman, I'm pretty sure he'd include the line, "She picketh stones and complaineth not." Imagine his shock when I actually volunteered to finish picking them all by myself. And so, while he headed off to the bean field on the other side of town, I drove a tractor and dump wagon out to the cornfield.

I took a swig from my water bottle and scanned the remainder of the field to be cleaned. Bad move. It looked so overwhelming that I almost jumped onto the tractor and high-tailed it home. But the warm sun on my skin and the scent of apple blossoms, lilac and a hint of manure on the breeze gave me courage. I decided that even if I only lasted an hour, it was a noble effort, worth pursuing.

The front of the field is near the highway. I tried hard not to stop and stare enviously at each and every motorbike that zoomed past on that magnificent afternoon. I found I was much happier working toward the back of the field, away from the din of traffic, recreational and otherwise. There no one could hear me belting out Helen Reddy's anthem, "I am woman,

when it is too late. How do we address these issues and try to prevent more losses of this nature? It is much more complex than I ever imagined. I've learned enough about medicine in Africa to admit that I don't have the answer.

I have come to realize that medical ministry in Africa is a lot like trying to eat an elephant. At first glance it is overwhelming, but you try to take it one bite at a time. Some days it just doesn't sit well in your stomach and you just want to quit eating altogether. Other days you get a little choked up, but keep munching away. And then, there are the days where you feel, 'Hey, I'm actually making some progress here!' Those are the days that keep you going.

Thanks for your interest in my eating disorder,

Ndokotora Rob
(Who is still hungry for more)

hear me roar." I contemplated the life lessons unfolding all around.

A killdeer hobbled along a few feet in front of me, dragging her "broken" wing, squawking out her "wounded bird" decoy. It only prompted me to search diligently until I found the nest she tried so desperately to lure me away from. I stared at the three stone-colored eggs in the indentation in the mud and considered how I probably wouldn't even have noticed her treasure if she hadn't made such a fuss. Still, as one mother to another I could relate to the need to protect her family.

I grabbed my dusty water bottle from the wagon and sipped the warm water, then wiped my sweaty face with a grubby hand. At home I won't even pour a glass of water without washing my hands first. Funny how perspectives change when you're really thirsty. I discovered a series of groundhog holes along the fence row and began amusing myself by tossing rocks into them from a distance. I wondered if there might be any practical use for this particular skill, then smugly realized it was useful in and of itself.

Stone by stone the heap on the wagon grew into a full load. I looked at the accumulating pile and thought about all the stone-picking days in the past, especially the years when our three children would come and help us after school and in the evenings. It occurred to me that over the years we had literally moved mountains, or at least a few formidable hills, one rock at a time. Seems to me there's some parallel between rocks and the problems of life.

After a couple of very warm hours, I finally pulled the tractor and wagon into the last spot that needed to be cleaned. Down by the creek the rocks are heaviest, so I climbed down from the tractor and took a deep breath. I surveyed the rows of corn stretching out evenly to the far end of the field now behind me. The plants had yellowed due to lack of sunshine in the previous weeks, and a couple of recent night frosts had taken their toll.

Some plants looked almost dead, but after this many years I know a little bit about corn. These beleaguered plants were drinking in the sunshine and heat, even now rallying imperceptibly. The battered leaves would recover under the right conditions and stretch up tall and green this summer. These plants that barely reached my ankles would grow to tower over my head, because that's what God designed them to do.

With a triumphant grunt I threw the last rock onto the wagon. I thought about dumping the load off onto the pile by the creek, but then figured Jack should see how hard I had worked. (Besides, I was afraid I might get the wagon stuck.) I put the tractor in gear and happily returned to the barnyard, rocks in tow. After I cleaned up, I packed some sandwiches and drinks and headed over to have supper with Jack.

The early evening sun was already low in the sky. As I drove along a little smile crossed my lips. I know why farmers look forward to spring. There's something truly satisfying about a day spent in the field, even if it is to pick stones.

But don't tell Jack I said that.

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Good news

WALKING WITH GOD

From three different sources I heard about the last Frisian service held May 21 in Brookside CRC, Grand Rapids. The service made quite an impact on those who attended. At the suggestion of John vander Stelt, we pried a copy of the sermon from Rev. Louis Tamminga to publish in CC. The Frisian service has been an annual event for the last 50 years. But this was the last one, as the number of people able to appreciate that language has dwindled. Rev. Tamminga preached in the first service when he was a student at Calvin Seminary – and now he did the last.

Copies of an English version of the sermon were handed out before the service, since there were many non-Frisians in the audience. Several car-loads of guests came from Ontario, and there was even a company of Dutch guests who were making a guided tour through the US.

Before the sermon proper, there was a reading from the first chapters of Genesis to sketch a picture of the times in which Enoch lived.

The difficult world and times of Enoch

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food . . . she took some and also gave to her husband. (3:6)

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head. (3:15)

Cursed is the ground . . . it will produce thorns and thistles . . . By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread. (3:19)

And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him (4: 8)

Cain said . . . "I will be a restless wanderer and whoever finds me will kill me (4:14)

I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. (4:24)

At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord. (4:26)

. . . he had a son . . . he named him Noah and said, "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed. (5:29)

Now let us read from Genesis Chapter 5, the first part in abbreviated form:

Adam was the father of Seth; he lived 930 years, and then he died.

Seth was the father of Enosh; he lived 912 years, and then he died.

Enosh was the father of Kenan; he lived 905 years, and then he died.

Kenan was the father of Mahalalel; he lived 910 years, and then he died.

Mahalalel was the father of Jared; he lived 895 years, and then he died.

Jared was the father of Enoch; he lived 962 years, and then he died.

Enoch was the father of Methuselah . . . (and Enoch did not die)

We continue with Genesis 5:21 –24.

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

And we also read from Hebrews 11:5,6. By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God. Because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Text: Gen. 5:21-24: Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

WALKING WITH GOD

Most of us here are immigrants. Sons and daughters of immigrants. Immigrants are found around the world. All through history there were immigrants. People on the move everywhere. The Jewish nation was a nation of immigrants. Adam was an immigrant. For him it was a harsh reality.

From the seventh generation of Adam came Enoch. He, too, lived in a world of wanderers, vagabonds. He will have known the hardships of immigrant life.

Of Enoch we read that *he walked with God*. Those who walk together will be friends. And when friends walk together they will talk: talking, listening, asking, answering, thinking, understanding. And silence, moments of blessed silence between friends. And that's how Enoch learned a lot. The name "Enoch" means wisdom.

Now we may ask: *How could a small human being such as Enoch walk with the great God, Creator of heaven and earth?*

Among interpreters of the Bible there are those who take this figuratively. They say Enoch communed with God in his heart. There are also those who propose to take it literally. I think they have a point.

We may go to Genesis Chapter 18 where we read of Abraham seated in front of his tent. He sees three men coming down the path. He stands up and welcomes them. Over refreshments they soon are in deep discussion. But it does not take long before Abraham realizes that they are more than just human. One of them is God, the others angels. And Abraham will have realized that he could have endured the presence of God, because God concealed himself in human form. And that's how Enoch could endure the presence of his God. God in human form. We may see in this reality a sign of the incarnation on which the New Testament was

to be based centuries later.

I have another question. *How could a sinner like Enoch walk in the presence of a holy God?*

Now we must go to the third chapter of Genesis. There we read of the origin of sin. God visits Adam and Eve, and also satan, the serpent. God foretells that the offspring of the woman will conquer the offspring of the serpent. God says that the woman's seed will crush satan's head. That was the *Mother Promise*, the promise of redemption and forgiveness. Adam and his generations might cling to that promise and live as forgiven people. Enoch knew that promise. Adam will have told him. Adam was still alive during Enoch's life time. So we see in Genesis Chapter 5 a sign that points to the cross of Jesus.

We must not think that Enoch, who relished the sweet presence of his God, became gradually estranged from the harsh world around him. In fact by knowing the *Creator* he began to cherish the *creation*. Enoch had both feet on the ground, he was a practical believer. In the little Letter of Jude in the New Testament we read that Enoch promoted the good in society and fought against evil. That was a tough assignment. Walking with God was his source of power. He dipped into that source when life proved to be too daunting. He, too, had to work for his daily bread in the sweat of his brow. The presence of his God was for him the source of power to persevere.

We may even put that a bit broader.

One day a remarkable event took place. Enoch and God went for another walk and, being in engaging discussion, they forgot the time. Enoch suddenly remembered that it was past supper time, so he thought he better hurry home. Then God made a proposal. He said, "Enoch, how would you like going home with me – you are getting on in age anyway." And so Enoch walked into heaven with his God. God will have sent a messenger to tell Enoch's people that Enoch was as safe as he could be: in heaven.

Now that, I thought, had some interesting implications. For you see, this Chapter 5 of Genesis, keeps repeating that people died. It really is a sad chapter, a chapter of many funerals, a chapter of grieving people, a chapter of tears. But then those people will have reminded each other: "Enoch did not die! He never needed to be buried. He went to heaven, just like that. Heaven is not far. It's within walking distance. Death could not lay hold of Enoch. And so we may see this as a signpost to Christ's resurrection. And that awareness put a glow on the difficult life of Enoch's day.

Now I must say something *about us and our times*.

My thoughts go back to that first Frisian service. I was up early that morning. I looked out of the window and there was a song in

my heart: "The sweet rising sun smiled at me...." I was looking forward to that church service. I had preached a few times already and it was ecstasy to me. The agony came later....

There were a lot of people around the Franklin Christian Reformed Church near Grandville. Frisians in a foreign land are each other's friends. Strangers approaching each other and talking a blue streak as if they were pals.

"And when did you come here?"

"1948 with the Tabintha."

... "Now isn't that something...."

"And where are you from?"

"From behind Alde Haske."

"Then you must have known my uncle Japik . . . Japik de Boer."

"Oh, but of course, been at his place lots of times as a young man...."

... "Isn't this a small world...."

After the service, an elderly woman approached me. We shook hands. I held her hand just a little longer so she would have a few more seconds to say that she had enjoyed the sermon. But she didn't. Instead she said, "How young you look. When you will have reached my age you will have experienced quite a bit."

That didn't worry me much. I had immigrated by myself from the Netherlands, my siblings had stayed home and I had easily proved my sense of independence. I was in the last year of the Theological School and was a good-looking young man with a nice head of hair. There wasn't much that I couldn't face. At least that's what I thought....

Our first church was in northern British Columbia. I was the youngest member of the Consistory; I did most of the talking. Probably the loudest too. The area was beautiful: high mountains, huge rivers, spectacular glaciers.... And then the forests! Unimaginable: woods stretching for hundreds of miles. I said to my wife: "Imagine that we would end up in 'The Woods' (a prominent, colorful area of Friesland.)

But with it came the loneliness for many of our church members who tried to make a living cutting trees in this lonely area. One day a member of the church approached me. He said: "You must visit with us, my wife is not well." And so we did. She said to me: "O, dominee, I am so home-sick, I cannot sleep, I cannot eat. This is such a harsh country. What must become of these little children?" And then, pointing her finger at me, she said slowly: "We don't belong in this land!"

That last sentence hooked itself in my soul. Sometimes I lay awake at night. I thought of our small church community, submerged by that large community of that nation called Canada. Who were we, really? For a new generation to grow up among us, we needed to have a home-country, a safe place. We needed to relate to the soul of that nation, a nation we didn't understand.

Good news



Enoch

We would have to accommodate ourselves? How could we do that? At what price? We must contribute to the well-being of that nation which had become ours by choice. But what did we have to offer?

Some years ago we made a trip to the Netherlands. One evening we were part of a visit with several people we had not really known. One spoke for the others. He said: "Now you must tell us, how has the immigration been these last fifty years, has it been a worthwhile venture? And you yourself, do you feel at home in Canada and the States?"

I hesitated in my answer.

"On the one hand, yes, pretty good ... but, on the other hand, ..." Well, we kept talking about immigration and its myriads of aspects.

Then that same man said: "You know, as I hear you, I think we, from a Dutch point of view, can relate to that. We are thankful that we have made a contribution to society's well-being and that we have been blessed with prosperity. But there are also moments when we feel discouraged, when a lot of things bother us, when we feel strangers in this society. Then we turn to a deeper spirituality to find the strength to go on."

And he referred to the Letter to the Hebrews, Chapter 11, where it says of Christians that they are strangers in this world, and that they long for a better City.

And I had to think of Jesus Christ who is the Lord of creation and had to feel at home in his Father's world. But Jesus also once said, "The foxes have holes and the birds have nests but the Son of Men has none whereon to lay his head..." And there at that visit we caught a glimpse of the essence

of Christian life: the rhythm of hiding with God for replenishment, and then, strengthened, return to life for service. Christ gave the example: he served, he knew worry and fatigue, and then he isolated himself with his Father in the wilderness, to return to life with new power and resolve.

We must look upon Jesus. He came to live among us in this crazy, mixed-up world. He took our plight upon himself. He reconciled us to the Father through his sacrifice. He rose from the dead for us. In the way of faith, his Spirit made us members of his Body. We are in him, he in us.

Now we can walk with God, actually in a more abundant way than Enoch ever could. Now we know ourselves in his presence throughout even the busiest of days, and even in the most painful trials. He is our very source of power, our very present help in trouble.

And so we accept from him a new mandate to serve him in society and to spread the gospel everywhere. In that power we can cope with the problems of life and the struggle to make a living. And from that source we can be nourished for a deeper spiritual awareness and a longing for the Savior's return.

On this Sunday we may pause and think of the Lord's goodness to us through this half century. He has provided for us as an immigrant community in so many ways.

We thank him for the contributions we might make to the societies of Canada and the US, modest as they may have been.

Today we thank God for the help that came to our immigrant communities from the Christian Reformed Church in the US in so many ways.

On this Sunday we remember those for

whom immigration brought sufferings and set-backs. Some paid a high price for labor that was hard and came to naught. There were tragedies among us. For many, immigration was the Cruel Paradise.

We think of those who tasted sorrow. We buried our mothers, our fathers. We buried brothers, sisters, friends. And for them there was no grave in Frisian soil (first line of a Frisian song). And some here stood at the open grave of a daughter, or a son.

To be self-sufficient became the immigrant way of life. We found it hard to live by grace. I visited a man in a rest-home. He said: "I must be thankful. We have been blessed. We have done well in this land. The children too..." Then he looked at me. "But you know," he said, "every time there is this thought that haunts me: that life has slipped through my fingers.... I have not lived by great ideals. And I cannot do life over again. I don't seem to know who I am. I wonder what I toiled for all these years. My heart is full of regrets."

I pondered on that. Regrets.... Do we have regrets? It is the oldest experience of mankind. Adam will have had regrets. He walked the earth. Adam saw all the ravages his sin had created. He will have known self-accusation self-indictment. He saw the suffering his sin had brought to others. And so the groanings of his heart... "if only I had not done that..."

But today we call out to Adam: "Cling to the Mother Promise, Adam! Look upon your great Son, the last Adam. You are forgiven, and the Lord Jesus will provide in all your failures. Adam, you must not go burdened under the load of your self-accusation."

That's what I told the brother in the rest

home. That's what I told myself. That's what we tell each other here today: let no one here go under the load of self-indictment, self accusation, and regrets. Look upon your Savior!

Walking with God....

Generations before and after Enoch, walking with God....

Our grandfathers and grandmothers, walking with God....

Parents walking with God... children, brothers, sisters, friends, walking with God!

We in Christ, God close to us. Heaven within walking distance....

Walking with him: the source of faith, hope and love.

AMEN

the Netherlands

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Ecclesiastes

Let's devote ourselves to the enjoyment of life

There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 8:14,15

A. A. van Ruler

This paean of praise to joy appears in a very specific context in Ecclesiastes, namely, in the context of the futility of human existence. Although we exert ourselves in all sorts of ways to achieve something enduring and substantive, these efforts are nullified by a thousand different factors. They all come to nothing.

In the immediately preceding verse, the Preacher is concerned foremost with the irrationality of fate. The righteous meet the same fate as the wicked, and the wicked meet the same fate as the righteous. Not that this is always the case. The Preacher isn't that pessimistic. But it does happen, and this is neither rational nor moral, he says. So why are we trying so hard? Life ends up in a slough of contradictions anyway.

We have named only one of a thousand similar factors. There are numerous other situations, events and contexts that lead to the same end. It is part of the bitter condition of human existence on earth. It seems to render life meaningless. Or in any case there seems to be no way to explain all these frustrations to human existence.

The worst thing about them, of course, is that they cast a shadow on the glory and holiness of Eternal God. There may well be a divine order in human life and in the world. At least the Creator does rule over the totality of things and events. But we human beings cannot come to know it. We gain no insight into how the divine order enters into the order of this world. The latter strikes us as a distorted order or as disorder.

After these observations, the Preacher suddenly declares: "So I commend the enjoyment of life." That seems like quite an about face. But with these words the Preacher means to say this: that there are things that in and of themselves are better than enjoyment. He has in mind things like the rationality and morality of world order and of human insight into that order. These are the real objects of his desire. He wishes that all of reality were transparently the just and holy work of Eternal God into which we can in a meaningful way weave our own deeds. As he sees it, the best thing would be: rational insight, meaningful action, a transparent reality, and the unadulterated glory of God.

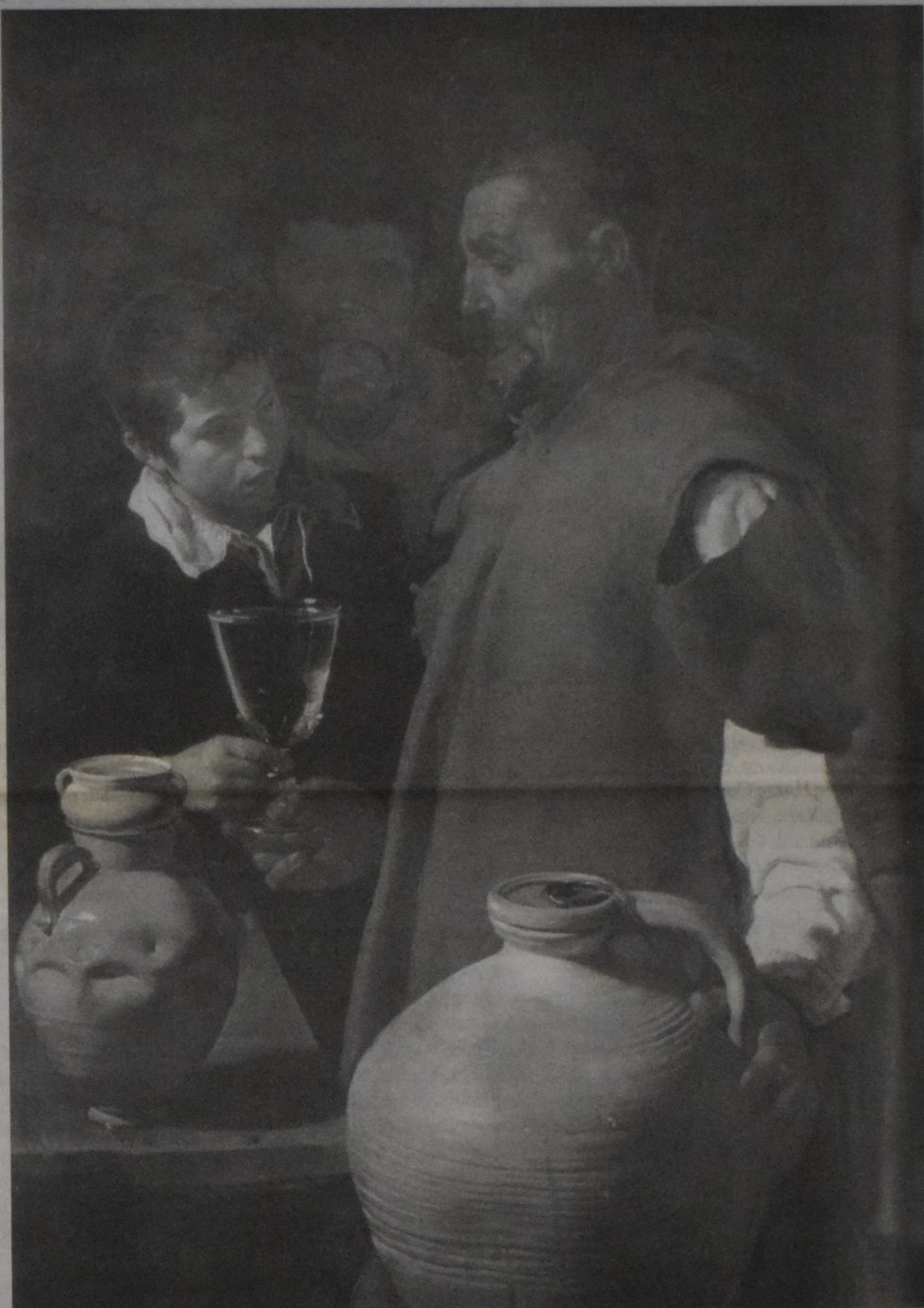
We should not, I think, give up that desire. We must emphatically not condemn this as rationalism and intellectualism. The quest for the light of reason in the whole of reality is the noblest and highest quest

of all. This is especially so if it is tied to the desire to graft one's own meaningful action into the rational totality of world affairs, and even more so if it is tied to the need to praise God's greatness in the light of this rationality. Part of eternal life, no doubt, will be bathing in the light of this reason.

However, that is not a light that is visible to human beings now, says the Preacher. Is this fatalism on his part? It certainly isn't revolutionary protest. The latter does occur in Scripture—in Job most clearly. But it isn't the despair of doubt either. Though this, too, can be part of the life of faith. Only believers can doubt: while they want to hold on to God's greatness in this life, sometimes in reality it completely slips away from them.

But instead of coming to rebellion or doubt, the Preacher reaches a highly positive conclusion. He says that although we have not been granted the best and the most essential thing, we have been given much. There are many good things that we must not despise and neglect. We have been granted the power to eat and to drink. This is a truly wonderful fact. We can enjoy food and wine. This makes life flourish. Eating and drinking keep us going, we are energized and revitalized. They keep us in being. And this is a good thing. It is certainly better than not being. We can even enjoy it. To use the words of Paul in Acts 14:17, "He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

The Preacher displays a remarkable realism here. He begins with the simplest things—eating and drinking. But when we allow the meaning of these things to fully sink in, we realize that they involve everything—the whole mystery of life and being. God meets us directly in these things. We can all become aware of this, and we all do to some extent. There is no one who is totally unaware of the goodness of eating and drinking heartily.



The water-seller of Seville

Perhaps it is just as well that we miss the light of divine reason. At any rate, I'm tempted to say so, for if we had full access to that light perhaps we would overlook the simple realities of eating and drinking. In so doing, we would be overlooking the unique mystery of creaturely existence and being.

There is an element of divinity in all rationality. From the perspective of pure reason I might forget the uniqueness of reality as creation. But I may never overlook the fact that I am, that I am I, that I am here and now, that I am a unique, concrete, irreplaceable creature. I experience this fact more in eating and in drinking than in thinking.

But let's not betray eternity. In eternity, divine reason and creaturely reality will be one harmonious whole. So it is not good to play the one off against the other. Now we have creaturely reality. We have it because that's what we are. We live it, eating and drinking. We enjoy it; it gives us joy.

We must prize this enjoyment. There really is nothing better under the sun. We must echo the wish that this joy will accompany us all in our work all the days of the life that God has given us under the sun. As long as we live, we are, and it should be something we enjoy. Life is full of such joy, each and every day. The heart, too, can be filled with such joy.

Review

A little oddity on the 'Prairie'

Peter Rainer

The artistic union of Robert Altman and Garrison Keillor was inevitable. Altman has always had a great affinity for making movies about the mores of America, its sorrows and cynicism, and Keillor, in his long-running syndicated radio show and the many books he has spun off from it, has – with less cynicism – mined a similar patch of terrain.

The movie *A Prairie Home Companion*, which Altman ("The Player," "Gosford Park") directed from a script by Keillor, that incorporates many of the elements of the radio show, is an odd duck even by the usual odd standards by which we have come to know Altman.

For one thing, the movie isn't really about the actual radio show, even though it goes by the same name and features many of the show's regulars. Keillor is referred to as G.K. and the show, far from being a hit, is a small-time affair heard locally each week in St. Paul, Minn. Worse, it is about to be canceled. As a result of a corporate change-over, the Saturday night show portrayed in the film both on and off stage is its last. The cast members know this, but not their loyal fans in the audience.

For this conceit to take hold, we have to suspend disbelief and imagine that the well-oiled "Prairie Home Companion" on display is not, in fact, the same one that legions of followers worldwide tune into each week. Otherwise, we would wonder why such a



commotion is being made over a cancellation that undoubtedly will soon be rectified by an eager new owner.

This may seem like a small point, but it's a bit like being asked to mourn the final taping of a cable TV show called "Seinfeld" prior to its untimely axing. Instead of choosing to base his script on his popular radio show, Keillor might have done better to freshly conceive a new one. As a result, an uneasy note of self-congratulation creeps into the movie: We all know that in reality old G.K. is doing just fine.

But in whatever guise you dress up the

radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion" has always been a marvelous concoction and Keillor's News From Lake Wobegone segment is often startlingly lyrical. Altman's movie captures some of that lyricism. Although contemporary, the film has the deliberately antique flavor of old-time radio – the world that existed before television.

It also has the buzzing vivacity of an Altman party movie. Lily Tomlin and Meryl Streep play Rhonda and Yolanda Johnson, sisters in a country duo that never made the big time; Lindsay Lohan plays Yolanda's daughter, who writes doggerel in the dressing room and gets her big chance to shine

at the show's finale.

They are all marvelous. (Yes, even Lohan – that's what a great director can do for you.) Streep and Tomlin are so attuned to each other that it's as if they had worked together all of their lives. In fact, it's their first time. Streep has become a wonderfully soulful comedian; Tomlin always was one.

Kevin Kline plays Guy Noir, a stock character in the actual radio program. Here he is a genially cuckoo backstage guard who imagines himself to be a Chanderlesque private eye. Woody Harrelson and John C. Reilly are a singing cowboy act, the Old Trailhands, and Virginia Madsen, in the film's wooziest conceit, plays a white-raincoated angel of death drifting through the backstage area in a zonked swoon. The rich atmosphere, shot in high-definition by cinematographer Ed Lachman, is resonant enough without this pseudo-mystic filigree.

Altman's best movies, and many that are not his best, have been about the loss of innocence – both ours and, by extension, America's. In *A Prairie Home Companion*, he buys into Keillor's forlorn sentimentalism to such an extent that it sponges up the director's scabrous side, the side of him that rages against the powers that be. That's appropriate here. At 81, Altman has earned the right to indulge his nostalgia for the way things were.

• Rated PG-13 for risqué humor.

Peter Rainer is a film critic for The Christian Science Monitor

Favorite and not so-favorite farm jobs

What farm jobs do farmers dislike the most? Is it fixing broken machinery? Greasing up equipment? Changing the tractor's oil? Helping a distressed cow calve? That can be a dirty job if you have to reach "inside" and straighten the calf's head and feet around so it can be born.

No one likes piling square bales of hay on a hot muggy day. Spreading smelly liquid manure isn't fun.

Ask five farmers what job they hate the most and you'll probably get five different answers. I don't like greasing up the front-end loader tractors. I run four tractors on my farm and three have front-end loaders. The big loader tractor is used mainly for removing and loading manure. Some of the grease nipples won't take grease. It's a job I often leave for my neighbor who runs a mechanical repair shop from his farm. While I do most of the equipment maintenance, he does all repair work.

To find out what jobs farmers dislike the most, I asked 50 full-time farmers in our county that question. I did the survey during the month of September, two years ago. Why September? That's the month I see farmers at the local fairs and at the local plowing match. I ask the question in person – never by phone. I jot down the name and the answer in a little

notebook. I had 50 answers.

The two most hated jobs are picking stones and fencing. Seven farmers (six men and one woman) chose picking stones as the worst job and seven farmers (five men and two women) dislike fencing the most.

Forking manure and scraping out calf pens was the next worse job followed by working with square bales of hay on a hot, muggy day. Teaching new-born dairy bull calves to drink milk out of a pail was a job farm women found frustrating. Bull calves can be very stubborn.

Favorite jobs

What do farmers like doing the most? Do they have a favorite job – one they love doing?

Again, I was curious and last September I asked 90 farmers what they like doing on the farm. I also asked 10 non-farmers – ones who live in a rural area – if they had a farm, what would they like doing on that farm.

I polled a good mixture of farmers at the fairs and plowing match – beef, dairy, cash-crop, sheep, hog, beekeepers, part-time and semi-retired farmers.

Again, no phone calls. I had 99 answers. An excellent response, wouldn't you say?

Most farmers had to think hard what they like doing best. Cutting hay was the number

one choice with 15 farmers. Eleven farmers said they enjoy working with cattle or checking their cattle. Dairy farmers polled like milking cows. It was tops with nine farmers. Seven farmers picked fall plowing and seven said combining is their favorite job. Six farmers enjoy baling hay. Four farmers like raking hay. Three farmers weren't particular – they just enjoy driving a tractor. Others include seeding, tinkering in the workshop, welding, running the self-propelled harvester, and training horses.

Non-farmers

And what would the non-farmers enjoy doing if they had a farm? Two women couldn't think of a thing – one finally settled for gathering eggs.

Round baling hay was the top choice, followed by plowing, raking hay and milking cows.

What surprised me most doing this interesting survey was the fact that dairy farmers enjoy milking cows. They love it! Milking



cows in a modern milking parlor or in a spacious and bright tie-stall barn is definitely a wonderful job – and one that pays well.

About that one farmer who didn't respond to the favorite job question? He'd been drinking when I quizzed him at a local farm auction sale. He waved me off saying he's semi-retired from farming.

In my local newspaper column, I thanked all the respondents for sharing their thoughts with me. When I questioned the farmers I made it clear it was for a newspaper column – agriculture columns which I have been doing weekly for 18 years. Only one farmer (Bob) asked that his name not be used in the column. Okay!

Maynard van der Galien operates a 420-acre live-stock farm at Renfrew, Ont.



Aging

Christian worldview and the challenge of the aged

*"Do not cast me off
in the time of old age"*

Albert Mohler

"Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails." This is the prayer of the Psalmist in Psalm 71:9. Like so many before and after him, the Psalmist fears being forsaken when he is old. In our own times, this concern takes on an entirely new magnitude, as the ranks of the elderly and aged grow at an unprecedented rate.

This is the concern raised by Eric Cohen and Leon R. Kass in their essay, "Cast Me Not Off in Old Age," published in the January 2006 edition of *Commentary*. Cohen, director of the program in biotechnology and American democracy at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and Kass, the former chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, have combined to write a most compelling essay on the challenge represented by millions of the aged among us.

Looking back to 2004 and the tragedy of Terri Schiavo, Cohen and Kass understand that the Schiavo case "revealed deep divisions in how Americans view debility and death." As they explain, "Some saw pulling her feeding tube as an act of mercy, others as an act of murder. Some believed she possessed equal human dignity and deserved equal care despite her total lack of self-awareness; others believed keeping her alive year after year was itself an indignity."

Beyond this, the Schiavo case indicated the limits of our national consensus about such matters as end-of-life ethics, the use of extended medical technologies, the validity of "living wills," and the overarching theme of personal autonomy.

The greatest challenges involve not only deciding when to let loved ones die, but figuring out how to care every day for those who can no longer care for themselves

Yet, Cohen and Kass understand that the Schiavo case, while not unprecedented, did not represent the usual context in which such issues arise. "In our aging society, most severe disability involves instead the frail elderly, who gradually but inexorably decline into enfeeblement and dementia, often leaving grown children to preside over their extended demise. The greatest challenges involve not only deciding when to let loved ones die, but figuring out how to care every day for those who can no longer care for themselves."

Death, disease, debility, and the challenges of growing old have been part of the human experience since the Fall. Once death became a natural part of the human experience, the question became how and when death might come and what kind of experience would precede natural death. Yet,

as Cohen and Kass understand, "the circumstances in which most Americans age and die are increasingly 'unnatural' and surely unprecedented."

In making this judgment, Cohen and Kass point to the fact that the development of high-tech medicine, the elimination of so many causes of natural death among the young, and the demographic reality

of an increasing percentage of the population counted among the elderly, represents a new experience, not only for this generation, but for the human race.

Interestingly, the authors cite Thomas Jefferson who, when asked if he would choose to live over again, said yes—but only between the ages of twenty-five and sixty. Jefferson saw no purpose in reliving his childhood and adolescence, and he nurtured few illusions about the reality of advanced age when, he wrote, "the powers of life are sensibly on the wane, sight becomes dim, hearing dull, memory constantly enlarging its frightful blank and parting with all we have ever seen or known, spirits evaporate, bodily debility creeps on palsying every limb, and so faculty after faculty quits us, and where then is life?"

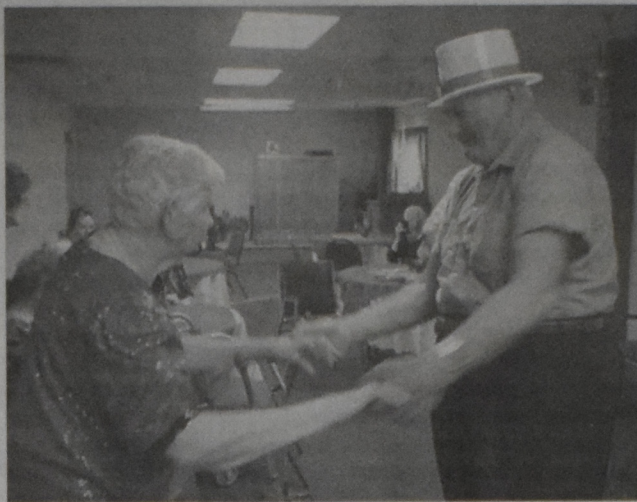
Jefferson's experience—living into such advanced age—was relatively unusual in his own generation, but it will be the normal and normative experience of millions now living. As Cohen and Kass understand, previous generations saw so many persons die "in the nursery of life or at the peak of their flourishing." In other words: "Living to old age was the dream of the vulnerable many; living with old age was the problem of the fortunate few."

The vulnerable many

The "fortunate few" of previous generations is now the "vulnerable many" of our own day, who, along with their loved ones and the larger society, must come to terms with what it means to age and to be a part of a society in which so many others are also aging.

As the authors report, the average life expectancy in the United States is now seventy-eight years and rising. As recently as 1900 the life expectancy of the average American was only forty-seven. Those over the age of eighty-five represent the fastest growing segment of the American population.

The good news is that many of these older Americans are living fulfilled and relatively healthy lives, extended into many years of



retirement and continued contributions to society. Accordingly, "On balance, it is a wonderful time to be old, and the democratization and expansion of old age are among modernity's greatest achievements."

Mass geriatric society

But this is not all there is to the picture. Cohen and Kass warn that we are now witnessing the development of a "mass geriatric society" which will present this country with massive economic, social, medical, political, and ethical challenges.

Cohen and Kass have both been deeply involved in the President's Council on Bioethics. Kass served as chairman of the Council, and Cohen currently serves as senior research consultant. Thus, their essay should be read in light of the Council's report, *Taking Care: Ethical Caregiving in Our Aging Society*. For any number of reasons, most having to do with the fact that the news media generally do not see this issue as adequately sensationalistic, the report has not received the attention it demands.

Cohen and Kass see a coming "perfect social storm" represented by a fast-growing proportion of the elderly and a shrinking number of younger adults who will be able to care for family members, loved ones, and others. Americans are living longer, but the process of death now often involves an extended period of enfeeblement and, in all too many cases, dementia. The authors cite a Rand study that indicated that approximately forty percent of current deaths in the United States are now preceded by a period of physical, and often mental, debility that may last as long as a decade. Of course, this may include the onset of Alzheimer's disease. At present, an estimated four million Americans suffer from Alzheimer's. Cohen and Kass report that the number is expected to rise to over thirteen million by the middle of this century, "all of them requiring many years of extensive, expensive, and exhausting full-time care."

Decline of the natural family

One of the benefits of the analysis offered

by Cohen and Kass is the focus on how the rise of a "mass geriatric society" is complicated by the decline of the natural family. Put bluntly, Cohen and Kass recognize that "precisely as the need is rising, the pool of available family caregivers is dwindling. Families are smaller, less stable, and more geographically spread out." Beyond this, most women are now employed outside the home, and there are already shortages of trained medical personnel available to tend to those who can't afford such assistance.

Thus, an explosion in the number of older Americans needing assistance and care comes at the very moment that finds the family weakened by ideological, cultural, economic, and social forces. The problems of old age are now routinely assigned to institutions, nursing homes, hospitals, and other settings—a far cry from when most Americans aged and died at home surrounded and aided by family members.

Indeed, some are ready to argue for a "duty to die" that assumes a responsibility for the elderly to get out of the way. Far more are ready to assume that the death of the elderly is at least preferable to long-term debility and decline.

Recognizing that, many Americans argue that there must be some better way to confront these challenges, and all too many appear willing to redefine human dignity in terms of quality of life, autonomous choice, and the competing interests of generations.

Indeed, some are ready to argue for a "duty to die" that assumes a responsibility for the elderly to get out of the way. Far more are ready to assume that the death of the elderly is at least preferable to long-term debility and decline. Both of these assumptions run into direct conflict with the Christian worldview and the Bible's teachings regarding reverence for life and respect for the aged. Confronting these assumptions will require Christian courage as well as keen Christian thinking. This challenge will not wait.

False solutions

In light of these challenges, Cohen and Kass suggest two false "solutions" that may appeal today to Americans who take opposing sides on these issues.

First, the authors dismiss the argument that the problems of old age can simply be solved by medical technology. They cite Dr. Mark B. McClellan, the top official at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, who claimed that "Medicare can do so much more than give you dignity in old age." Dr. McClellan claimed that Medicare can actually extend life, improve health, and save money by preventing and curing the diseases of old age.

Aging

Cohen and Kass dismiss this as “the medical gospel of healthy aging.” While accepting that persons can do much to make themselves healthier and to extend active and vigorous life, Cohen and Kass understand that life itself, even with medical treatments, involves limitations. It is foolish, they suggest, “to act and speak as if medical progress (whether in prevention or in cure) will liberate us from the realities of decline, debility, and death or from the unavoidable duties of caregiving at the end of life.” The authors insist that the paradox in modern aging is this: we are vigorous longer and we are incapacitated longer.

Most tellingly, Cohen and Kass criticize much of the propaganda about old age now commonly advertised in our society. “Finally,” they note, “there is something weird about treating old age as a time of life when things should always be ‘getting better.’ While aging affords some people new possibilities for learning and ‘growth,’ it also means – eventually and inevitably – the loss of one’s vital powers. Some people may ride horses or climb mountains into their seventies and eighties, just like in the commercials for anti-arthritis medication, but such idealized images offer a partial and misleading picture of the realities of senescence, that series of small dyings on the way to death.”

The second “solution” Cohen and Kass rightly dismiss is the “legal gospel of the living will.” Returning to the case of Terri Schiavo, Cohen and Kass lament the fact that the significance of this tragedy for so many Americans was, as so many in the media insisted, the moral lesson that one should always have a written living will or “advance directive” to guide medical decisions once one is no longer in a capacity to speak for oneself.

The worldview of individual autonomy

With keen insight, Cohen and Kass point to the worldview of individual autonomy as the driving force behind the development of living wills and the current confidence in these documents as the “solution” to difficult issues at the end of life.

In the first place, Cohen and Kass recognize that living wills simply do not live up to their reputation. The documents are often legally unsustainable, and medical personnel are often unaware of such documents or unable to make decisions that are in any sense clearly based upon the desires of the patient who framed the document. They cite a study that indicated that decisions made by surrogates using living wills “were no more likely to reflect the patient’s prior wishes than decisions made by family members judging on their own.”

Most important, Cohen and Kass understand that the inevitable bottom-line issue is the dignity of human life. While our society holds a general consensus concerning equal human worth when it comes to the healthy, Cohen and Kass argue that “this general agreement regarding equal human worth can

disappear in some cases.” Specifically, “Although many continue to believe that every human life, regardless of debility, possesses equal dignity, others now argue openly that equal treatment for all is best advanced by not diverting precious resources to the severely disabled. Still others believe that the indignities of old age – especially dementia – belie all sanctimonious talk of ‘equal worth.’”

In the end, Cohen and Kass argue for Americans to understand that there are better and worse ways to understand the challenge of aging. The worldview of personal autonomy corrupts the question by placing moral confidence in the real or perceived intentions of the patient, generally without regard to the larger moral context or to enduring moral principles.

As they argue, “The better way begins in thinking of ourselves less as wholly autonomous individuals than as members of families; in relinquishing our mistaken belief that medicine can miraculously liberate our loved ones or ourselves from debility and decline, and instead taking up our role as caregivers; and in abjuring the fantasy that we can control the manner and the hour of our dying, learning instead to accept death in its proper season as mortal beings are replaced and renewed by the generations that followed.”

This is a statement of moral insight that is deeply based in a biblical worldview and in an understanding of human dignity that is rooted in something larger than individual autonomy. The Christian worldview adds the absolute affirmation of human dignity at all stages of life, and in all conditions of life, whether young or old. Furthermore, the Christian worldview insists upon the respect due the aged as honored members of the family and of the larger society.

Without doubt, the rise of the “mass geriatric society” described by Cohen and Kass will present all Americans with a dramatic series of challenges. The church faces an even greater challenge – to develop a theology of aging that is deeply rooted in the riches of Scripture and is directly relevant to the real-life challenges of growing old. Inevitably, a genuinely Christian vision of aging and the aged will represent a counter-thrust against the spirit of the age.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., serves as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary – the flagship school of the Southern Baptist Convention and one of the largest seminaries in the world. He has been recognized by such influential publications as Time and Christianity Today as a leader among American evangelicals. In fact, Time.com called him the “reigning intellectual of the evangelical movement in the U.S.”



Retiring by drift or design?

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

“I shutter when I think of all the boomers who will be retiring in the next decade or so,” remarks Sandy as I sit down with her for coffee at the local Starbucks. She looks healthy and rosy-cheeked, much better than she did two months ago when she was teary and unhappy. “Who would have thought Howard and I would be visiting a therapist in our early sixties!” I chuckled, quietly recalling my own struggle with the intricacies of change a few years ago. “For sure, they should rephrase the term ‘retirement,’” she continued. “A more active word would help us see this stage of life differently. Especially because we could live another 20 to 30 years after we so-called ‘retire.’”

I look at her blooming face and cannot help but think back two months ago when she was sitting at the same table tearfully telling me how miserable she felt.

At that time, she was at her wits end but could not make sense of what was going on. Still, she knew she felt resentful towards her husband, which surprised her because when he retired he took a gourmet-cooking course and became so enthused about being able to cook up a storm he also decided to take on the rest of the household tasks. Equally surprising was his insistence to do the household finances, which she had been looking after since they got married. At first, she was taken aback by his enthusiasm but decided to go along with it. Eventually, she found herself a three-day a week job. Around the same time, her daughter also went back to work, and Sandy cared for their grandchild a day and a half a week.

Unfortunately, the role reversal was not working. While it took Sandy only one hour every month to do the family books, Howard began spending many hours on the computer. At the same time, he also did not understand the need for routine, consistency and dependability in running a home. When Sandy came home in the evening, she never knew what shape the house would be in. Whenever she tried to talk to him about it, he would dominate the conversation about how he was trying to help. As time went on Sandy felt more and more out of sorts.

After three years Sandy decided to seek help. In the safety of the therapy room Sandy was able to talk about how she often felt burdened in the early years of marital and family life when she was raising three children, working part time and volunteering at church and school. During this time, Howard was the main breadwinner and busy with his work as well as various community responsibilities that went along with his job. Consequently, Sandy carried most of the load at home. She found it especially hard when the children were teenagers. Over time, however, the children moved out or went to college. Two eventually married and the third worked overseas. Sandy welcomed these changes. She realized the juggling act was over. Now she had time for walks and talks with friends and was also able to take a class at the local university to feed her intellectual mind. She loved her calm and orderly life.

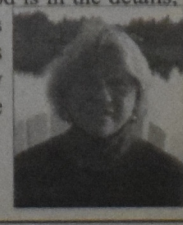
When the couple decided to have a joint session with the therapist it became clear that before retirement both Sandy and Howard had maintained separate fields of influence and activity from which they received satisfaction, meaning and self esteem no matter how stressful the juggling act was for Sandy or how repetitious the job became for Howard.

At the same time, Howard expressed regrets for passing up various opportunities at work during the last ten years in an attempt to keep him challenged.

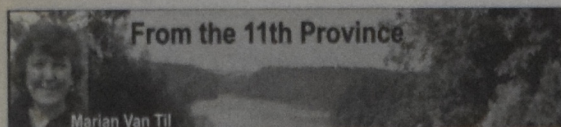
The therapist helped him link his frantic home activity with the guilt he felt about not being there for Sandy during the busy family years – as well as how his lack of initiative is now keeping him addicted to the computer and stuck at home. Sandy, on the other hand, became aware of how she tries to accommodate Howard rather than be assertive in terms of her needs. She also learned she enjoys the calm rhythms of home making and family life and now realizes how these tasks keep her grounded. Consequently, she again took over the care of the home and the finances. The therapist in turn worked with Howard and developed a ten year retirement plan that helped him use his gifts in the community in a way that brings satisfaction and meaning while at the same time allowing him the freedom retirement offers.

I glance at my watch and realize our coffee time is over. As we get ready to leave Sandy cannot resist being philosophical. “I believe God is in the details,” she says as she gathers up her belongings. “You see, most of us are committed to the big picture of our life. Yet, our struggle is the small picture – the intricacies of how we relate every day to those we love. Yet, it is here, we most often need to see the face of God.” I agree and wish her well.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca



Reflections



From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

obey 1. carry out the command of. **b** carry out (a command).
 2. do what one is told to do.... Latin *obedire* from *audio* hear
obedient 1. obeying or ready to obey. 2. submissive to another's will. **obedience** *n.* **obediently** *adv.*

Carrying out the commands of another, doing what one is told, being submissive to another's will: those are not popular activities in our culture, and less so is the state of mind – or rather, heart – that is required for obedience: meekness (self-effacement), humility, self-control, generosity, patience, kindness, considering others before oneself. In fact, obedience is very much out of fashion, and perhaps the more so for those of us who are women.

The obedience of the “obeyee” smacks of subservience, kow-towing and lack of self-esteem. And, it is very often assumed, the one being obeyed is overstepping his bounds in asking or requiring obedience. As a case in point, by the time I was in college in the early 1970s (still part of the '60s era) it had become popular for my fellow women classmates who were about to marry to expunge the word “obey” from their marriage vows. Had I gotten married at that time, I would have done the same.

But wait a minute! The qualities listed above sound a lot like the fruits of the Spirit. That is hardly a coincidence. Willingness to obey does not come from a spirit that is arrogant, impatient, aggressive or self-concerned; and especially not from a spirit of individualism in which the center of the universe is oneself.

Antiquated concept

When I myself did marry a decade and a half after some of my college classmates, the idea of a wife's obedience to her husband was well and firmly dead (in the mainstream, anyway) – and good riddance, most people said. And they say it today even more resoundingly. Obedience is an antiquated concept that just perpetuates inequality, particularly in marriage. Though at the time of my marriage I had a much better understanding (I think) of Paul's admonition to wives to obey their husbands than I did as a college student, I admit that on my wedding day I did not specifically promise to do that.

The notion of mutual submission was alive and well, however, in the centuries-old vows, usurped from the Anglican tradition, that Ed and I spoke to each other before God: *I take you ... to have and to hold from this day forward; for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish for the rest of our lives, according to God's holy law....* We also promised, when exchanging rings as a symbol of our vows “with all that I am and all that I have, I honor you in the name of God.” Well, that's okay, then (isn't it?).

Since we in North American have long since shucked the kind of society that used to view women as chattel or that demanded obedience to potent princes and monarchs or to powerful tyrants, *obedience* hardly seems a necessary concept, in marriage, in the family, or in public life. Kids can be warped by insistence that they obey their parents and teachers, we're told. It's true that we “obey” our government, most notably in the area of traffic laws (when we're not in a terrible hurry) and paying taxes (but not if we can help it), but that is really more concurrence than obedience. After all, these days there is no Nebuchadnezzar commanding us to bow down to a 90-by-nine-foot golden image when the music starts. (Or is there?)

All of us modern Christians would (I hope) have a problem with a 21st century equivalent of Nebuchadnezzar, because, well, as Peter and some of the other apostles said long ago when in a very tight spot, “We must obey God rather than men.” (And surely we'd pray to be given the

‘Trust and obey’

faith and courage to endure the modern equivalent of the fiery furnace.) But there's that word *obey* again. It's okay, though, because the obedience applies to God this time, not to a spouse, and certainly not to a governor who is an egomaniacal braggart with delusions of grandeur.

It doesn't ‘sell’

But *is* it okay? Do we really need to see ourselves in the kind of relationship to God which requires talking about *obedience*? Apparently numerous Christians today don't really think so. I'm acquainted with a man who has had a long career as a choral conductor and composer in the Reformed community. Over the years many of his choral compositions and hymn arrangements have been published, and they've sold well. Fairly recently he submitted another arrangement, this time of a well-known 19th century hymn the first verse and chorus of which anybody my age or younger learned in Sunday school or in their Christian day school: “Trust and Obey.” He was troubled when he heard that his usual publishers weren't the least bit interested in his setting of this particular song.

Was his arrangement suddenly sub-par? No, it was the song itself. Granted, “Trust and Obey” is not the greatest hymn in Christendom by a long shot. However, set to a simple tune that is almost jaunty (and which rather peculiarly suits the text), its four stanzas by John H. Sammis succinctly state some basic biblical truth about obedience to God. So why were these Christian publishers not interested? Because, as one of them candidly put it, “It won't sell. No one wants to hear a message about obedience.”

This is what the hymn says:

1. *When we walk with the LORD in the light of his Word
What a glory he sheds on our way.
When we do his good will he abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey, for there's no other way
to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.*
2. *Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
but our toil he doth richly repay;
not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,
but is blest if we trust and obey. (Refrain)*
3. *But we never can prove the delights of his love
until all on the altar we lay;
for the favor he shows, for the joy he bestows,
are for them who will trust and obey. (Refrain)*
4. *Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at his feet,
or we'll walk by his side in the way;
what he says we will do, where he sends we will go;
never fear, only trust and obey. (Refrain)*

Apparently a lot of Christians *have* found ways to “be happy in Jesus” that they think doesn't involve obeying him. Sure he's God. But he's a friend, a confidant, a brother – a fellow human being; an equal, almost. To focus on Jesus as Creator, Redeemer, and especially as Judge makes him just too remote, too “other.” To think of God as he who must be obeyed is a downer. (Christians who feel that way – who presumably aren't reading their Bibles much – might be surprised to learn that Jesus says, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” And that he warns a disobedient church-full of lukewarm believers that he, as Judge, will spew them out of his mouth. *What a friend we have in Jesus?*)

For as in Adam all die...

If this modern negative attitude about obeying God is as widespread as it appears, it is problematic, to say the least,

because from start to finish our proper human relationship to God rests on *obedience* to him. Adam and Eve *disobeyed*. And the world was riven apart. Though Christ the Second Adam has re-paved the way back to God, does anybody doubt that we continue to reap the consequences of that disobedience? Obedience just doesn't come naturally to us. God insists upon it, though. And through Christ we can put to death the sinful nature that shuns obedience.

I've been reading the book of Jeremiah lately, and re-read Isaiah before that. If obedience is, or should be, the operative word in our renewed relationship to God, there are plenty of stark examples in Jeremiah and Isaiah (and in all the prophets, and in almost every book of the Bible) of what we can expect when we go our own way. Israel's long Babylonian exile and all the defeats and famines and plagues that came before it was about one thing: *disobedience*. (Even the demons who Jesus cast out were smart enough to obey him.) On the other hand, again and again God told Israel, and tells us, “Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you” (Jer. 7:23).

In modern Christendom it's still okay (mostly) to talk about discipleship. In a way, that's ironic: the root of discipleship is *discipline*, and what is discipline in the Christian life but the ever deepening ability to live for God?; and what is living for God but obeying his commands and desires for us?

Jeremiah, at God's direction, uses the image of God as a potter and us as the clay in the potter's hands. When we submit to his will we are malleable clay that he shapes into comely and useful vessels. But when we “follow the stubborn inclinations of our evil hearts” (God's description of his disobedient people, Jer. 7:24) we become hard, misshapen pots that require total reconstruction – or throwing into the fire! The point is also, of course, that the “pot” is in no position to question the actions or requirements of the potter. (“What he says we will do, where he sends we will go.”)

Who, me?

Since we have a hard time relating to ancient Israel's worship of gods of wood and stone, and are sickened at their actually offering their children as sacrifices to those gods, it's hard to accuse ourselves of idolatry. But what becomes clear from Scripture is that all disobedience to God is a form of idolatry. That's because whenever we either disregard or outright disobey God and his biblical commands that reveal his will for us, we always displace him in our priorities. And if God isn't our highest priority – our god – something or someone else is. And that's idolatry.

We should obey God simply because he is God and he requires it. But as “Trust and Obey” says, in line with Scripture, there are also rewards for obedience. (We Reformed folks tend to downplay the rewards talk, lest we appear to be implying that our works will save us.) God promises to graciously bless those who fear him and follow his commands. He gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey him (Acts 5:32). And Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28). He assures us, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” And again, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.”

If the idea of obedience is still unpalatable, consider this: where would you (and we all) be if Christ had not been “obedient unto death”?

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at <mvanatil@adelphia.net>.

Lifestyles/Review

Beating guns into guitars



Danna Harman

BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA – The last chord is hit and smoke floods the stage. The spotlights go crazy, the crowds go crazy, and the rocker thrusts his electric escopetarra into the air. "This is about transformation," César López will explain later, backstage, strumming the strange-looking instrument. "It's about turning something bad into good.... It's about possibilities."

More than 100,000 Colombians have been killed here during 40 years of conflict and a civil war continues to rack the country, pitting leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary forces against both each other and the government.

The past four years under newly re-elected President Alvaro Uribe have not ended the bloodshed, but they have seen some advances. Following negotiations with the paramilitaries and initial talks with some of the guerrillas, 39,580 illegal combatants have demobilized, laying down approximately 17,000 weapons, according to President Uribe's office.

The weapons these fighters turn in – Galils, Winchesters, AK-47s, and more – are taken into custody by the attorney general's office and stored in military bases. Some of them will eventually be melted down. Others will be reissued to the police and army.

And a small number of them will become guitars.

An escopetarra is part shotgun (escopeta) and part guitar (guitarra) – with the barrel running through the neck of a guitar, strings mounted near the butt of the rifle, and an amplifier hooked into where the trigger might be.

"We grew up with conflict but we are sick of it," says Mr. López, the musician who invented the first escopetarra. López's older sister, a guerrilla, was captured in the 1970s and, he says, tortured. "That made a big impression on me. It made me want to figure out how this country would ever be OK."

The idea for the escopetarra came to him several years ago. Together with a group of musician friends, López had established an artistic "rapid response battalion," that would show up at scenes of attacks in Bogotá to play free concerts for the victims.

It was February 2003 and López was racing to the scene of a bombing at a social club – an attack that killed 30 people – when his way was blocked by a young soldier holding a rifle.

"I was standing there with my guitar, across from the soldier, and I looked at our stances and realized they were identical," López recalls. "I thought about it, and then went to the military to explain my vision and try and get them to give me guns to turn them into guitars. They thought I was a wimp and a hippie and said no."

The mayor of Bogotá, who was running his own local disarmament program at the time, was more amenable to the idea, and gave the musician five heavy Winchesters that had been handed in by leftist rebels. Several designs, five weeks, and \$800 later, the first escopetarra came into existence.

It was an immediate hit, with Colombian rock stars lining up to use it and youngsters' adopting it as an antiwar symbol. So far, only five such instruments exist because, explains López, of the difficulty in procuring the arms. The authorities often need to hold on to the weapons for evidence in potential trials.

It is estimated that two to three million illegal weapons are floating around Colombia. The FARC, Colombia's largest and strongest guerrilla group, has refused to negotiate with the government or to disarm. Furthermore, it is generally believed that even those groups who do disarm – such as the paramilitaries – do not hand in all their weapons. Perhaps most significantly, the billions of cocaine dollars a year streaming into the country means that the groups can easily rearm.

"Regardless of massive efforts on the parts of governments, embargoes, and UN efforts ... if you have money, you can get arms," says Moises Naim, author of "Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy." "Top members of the organization ... have access to cocaine money, and can easily place a new order for anything from bullets to rocket launchers."

The FARC are "rich terrorists," says William Wood, US ambassador to Colombia. "They don't steal weapons, they buy them. The number of weapons turned in is important. But still, we all know the bad guys have money to buy more."

Many of these new arms, says Marta Lucia Ramirez, a former Colombian defense minister, stream in through the porous borders of Venezuela and Ecuador. When Salvatore Mancuso, commander of the country's largest and most brutal right-wing paramilitary group, disarmed last year his personal pistols were traced back to Venezuela. The US last month announced it planned to stop selling arms to Caracas because of such reported transfers.

In this context, it is clear the invention

of the escopetarra will have little effect on the number of arms in circulation, admits López. But, he stresses, symbolism is a strong weapon, too.

The UN has commissioned an escopetarra to display at its upcoming UN Conference on Arms scheduled later this month. The Museum of Modern Art in New York has shown interest in purchasing one, and Colombian rock star Juanes recently auctioned off his personal escopetarra in Los Angeles for \$17,000 to benefit victims of land mines. López meanwhile has just been made a UN goodwill ambassador and in January he received two AK-47s that will be turned into escopetarras for the musician Shakira and Mexican pop artist Juliet Venegas.

And in light of the growing wave of international appreciation for the escopetarra project, the military seems to have changed its tune about "hippies." This week, it is scheduled to give 12 AK-47s to López. "Progress is slow," he admits, putting down the escopetarra and getting ready to go home, "... but at the end we will have a whole escopetarra rock band strumming."

• Ms. Harman is Latin America correspondent for the Monitor and USA Today.



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We thank you for all your wonderful love and care.

We praise God for his faithfulness
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Obituaries

*My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Psalm 73:25*

After a courageous four-year battle with cancer, the LORD has taken
into his Glory our beloved son, father, grandfather and brother

JOHN MULDER

Born August 8, 1932 in Sappemeer, The Netherlands

Died May 30, 2006 in St. Catharines, Ontario

He leaves behind his beloved wife of 51 years, Gerry Mulder (Wildeman)

Dear father and precious grandfather of:

Harry & Jane Mulder - Devin, Sheena, Brianna, *Ottawa, Ontario*

Henry & Sharon Mulder - Stephanie, Joel, *Caledon, Ontario*

Judy & Eric Kuiper - Johnathan, Jessica, *St. Catharines, Ontario*

Survived by his father Harry Mulder (*Brampton*), 5 brothers, & 1 sister.
Predeceased by infant daughter, infant grandson, 2 sisters, & a brother.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Matthew 5:8

The funeral was held on Friday, June 2, 2006
at Trinity Christian Reformed Church, St. Catharines

In honor of John's life, donations may be made to the Beacon
Christian School and Princess Margaret Hospital in his name.

Correspondence: Gerry Mulder, 202-55 Main St
St. Catharines ON L2N 4T8

SUSAN (SJOUKJE) GREIDANUS

June 6, 1909 - May 29, 2006

On May 29, 2006, at the age of 96, our dear mother,
grandmother, and great-grandmother, Susan Tiersma
Greidanus, entered into the joyful presence of her Lord
and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We are thankful for her long life, her love for and
commitment to the LORD, her love for each one of us,
her daily prayers for each of us by name, her nurture
and care, her warm hospitality, her countless letters and
cards, her modeling Christian living by being there for
others.

Susan was predeceased by Nies Greidanus, her
husband of fifty years, all her siblings, and Horace Baker,
her son-in-law.

She is survived by her children: Janice Baker, Sidney
and Marie, Morris and Alice, Thomas and Janet, Beatrice
and George Vandervelde, Wilma and Vern Gleddie, Peter
and Bette, Helen and Gil Vergilio; thirty grandchildren
and fifty great-grandchildren.

Correspondence: Wilma Gleddie, RR 4 Box 70
Edmonton AB T5E 5S7
e-mail: gleddiev@aol.com

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith
and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8*

On Wednesday, May 24, 2006 after a courageous battle
with a long illness, surrounded by his loving family,
the LORD took Home to be with him in Glory.

JACK FEDDEMA

at the age of 71 years.

Dearly beloved husband of 48 years of Ann Feddema-Linker.
Loving father of Rick & Carmen Feddema of *Calgary*,
Ken Feddema of *Samia*, Judy & Paul Rivard of *London*,
Anita Feddema of *Samia*, Cathy & Grant Linnell of *London*.
Cherished Opa of Kayla, Curtis, Kevin and Carissa Feddema,
Joy and Jenny Feddema, and David and Julie Linnell.

The funeral service was held on May 29, 2006
at the Westmount Chr. Ref. Church, Strathroy, Ontario.
Pastor Fred VanderBerg officiated.

Correspondence address: Ann Feddema 113-400 Dominion St,
Strathroy ON N7G 3G8

1912

2006

*In my father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I
would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place
for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will
come back and take you to be with me that you also may
be where I am. John 14:2,3*

On Monday June 5, 2006 at Grace Manor,
Holland Christian Homes in Brampton, Ontario
the LORD came quietly and took her home.

MARTHA SCHENSEMA

Beloved mother of: Margaretha of *Brampton*
Willem & Heleen of *Chicago, Ill*
Roel & Joanne of *Oakville*
Pieter & Doreen of *Toronto*
Marijke & Raymond of *Beeton*
Ben & Renate of *Three Hills, Alta.*
Martin & Nancy of *Guelph*

20 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren
Dear sister-in-law of Wetie Schmitz of *Brampton*
Predeceased by loving husband Pieter

Her daily life bathed us in the love of God.

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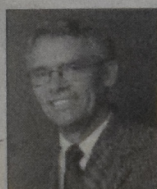
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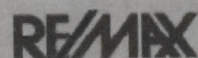
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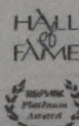


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Events/Advertising

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- July 1** Frisian Picnic, 11 a.m. at Pinehurst Conservation Park, Hwy 24, 6.4 kilometers north of Paris, Ont. .
- July 2** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Klomps will be preaching.
- July 2** Frisian Day Service. Foargonger: Ds. J.D. Hellinga. Snein de neimideis om trije ure yn de Maranatha Reformeare Tsjerke, 577 Norwich Ave (off 401), **Woodstock**, Ont.
- Oct 27-29** **Hamilton** District Christian High School 50th anniversary weekend. For information about activities or to register as alumni: www.hdch.org or 905.648.6655

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News

Why East Timor is falling apart

Nick Squires

DILI, EAST TIMOR – Emerging from the still smoking ruins of her neighborhood in Dili, Rita Mesquita was in no doubt as to who is responsible for the arson, looting, and gun battles that have plunged East Timor's capital into chaos.

"I blame the prime minister for the destruction and all the tragedy here," the 45-year-old mother says, angrily pointing at the burned-out remains of tin-roofed houses. "He's the worst man I know."

Mrs. Mesquita is not alone. As vicious ethnic unrest roils the country, requiring an Australian-led expeditionary force to descend on Asia's poorest country for the second time in less than a decade, there is a widespread perception that Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri bears much of the responsibility.

From the streets of Dili to the mountains of the interior, many say his government's handling of a recent standoff within the army is indicative of the favoritism, corruption, and arrogance that they say has plagued East Timor's government since the nation gained independence in 2002.

Instead of listening to the grievances of the 600 soldiers that went on strike in March to protest alleged ethnic discrimination, the government sacked them. The move has provoked successive waves of tit-for-tat violence, and the renegade troops have taken to the hills and remain in a tense face-off with the government.

"Alkatiri is a criminal and should face justice," says the rebels' charismatic young leader, Lieutenant Commander Alfredo Reinado, as he paces the verandah of the hill-top Portuguese-era villa he has commandeered as rebel headquarters. He said there will be no end to the crisis unless the prime minister resigns.

A Portuguese-speaking sophisticate, Mr. Alkatiri appears to have difficulty connecting with the mass of East Timorese, who speak more than 30 local languages. Many regard him as arrogant, aloof, and dictatorial. He also lacks credibility: Unlike President Xanana Gusmao, who devoted years to fighting the occupying Indonesian military from jungle hideouts, Alkatiri spent the same period in exile in Mozambique.

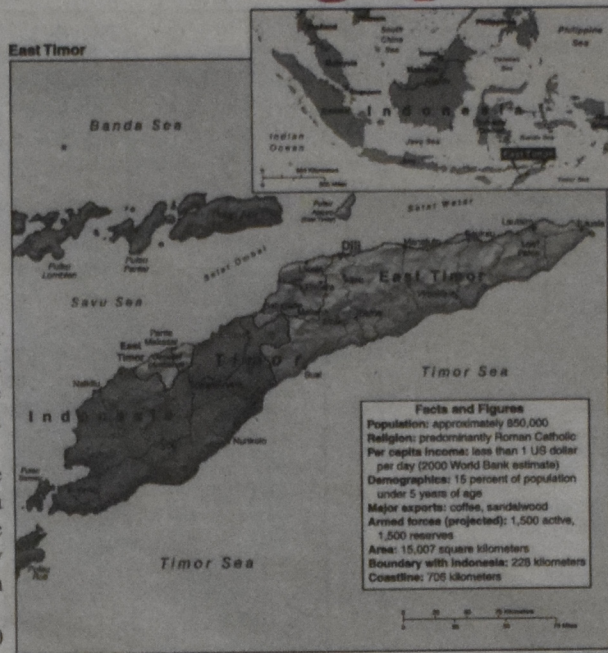
Indonesia had invaded the country after a civil war in the early 1970s. Up to 180,000 people are estimated to have died in the ensuing 24-year occupation, with the Indonesian military conducting a scorched-earth policy against East Timorese guerrilla fighters.

The tiny country – which spent 400 years as a neglected Portuguese colonial backwater – voted overwhelmingly for independence in 1999, unleashing a wave of violence and destruction of infrastructure by Indonesian soldiers and pro-Jakarta militias.

Seven years on, the national solidarity that garnered much praise internationally appears to be in tatters. Lt. Cdr. Reinado and his renegade troops, which constitute half the army, have deserted their posts and are hiding out in the mountainous interior, supported by elements of the police.

They accuse Alkatiri of shooting five unarmed protesters in Dili last month – charges that Alkatiri denies. Gangs of disenfranchised youths armed with machetes, swords, and even bows and arrows, have embarked on a series of tit-for-tat attacks, and Dili's ramshackle neighborhoods have been set alight.

The clashes have further exposed the East-West fault line in East Timorese society, with Easterners regarding themselves as the mainstay of the struggle against Indonesian occupation, and Westerners perceived as being too close to Indonesian West Timor, just across the border.



These murderous ethnic and political divisions have been exacerbated by chronic underdevelopment and 50 percent unemployment: East Timor's illiteracy rate is among the highest in Asia, the population is soaring and many families live on \$1 a day. Huge offshore oil and natural gas deposits promise to bring billions of dollars' worth of revenue, but much of the production has yet to start because of years of acrimonious talks over Australia's overlapping claims.

Mr. Gusmao, the president and a hero of the liberation to whom the disaffected soldiers profess allegiance, announced that he had assumed all powers over the military and police, in what was seen as a snub to Alkatiri. But the rebels say that is not enough to diffuse the standoff, and want the prime minister's resignation forthwith.

Signs of political movement emerged later in the day with the resignation of the defense minister Roque Rodrigues and the powerful interior minister, Rogerio Tiago Lobato.

But descending the twisting mountain road that leads back to Dili, plumes of smoke could be seen rising from the most recently torched houses. Thousands of desperate refugees, made homeless by the unrest, stormed a government warehouse and looted 50-kilogram sacks of rice before being chased away by hard-pressed Australian troops in full combat gear.

"Get back and stay back," screams one trooper, armed with an automatic rifle.

"We can understand their frustration," says another soldier, Corporal Jarrett Vesely. "They are just hungry."

Australian armored personnel carriers were dispatched to help quell the chaos, Black Hawk helicopters clattered overhead, and tear gas was used to break up rival gangs marauding along potholed roads lined with crumbling colonial villas.

The Australians have been put in an almost impossible role as policemen, peacemakers, and emergency food-aid providers. But despite their robust tactics they have been warmly welcomed – even by the renegade Reinado.

"They can't deliver a miracle in one day, but their conduct so far has been very good," he says, surveying the thatched huts, dirt tracks, and coffee plantations in the valley below.

"We have to cooperate with the international forces, but in the end it's only the Timorese who can solve East Timor's problems."

News briefs

Coffee brainwashing

According to a recent study, sipping that mug of java before you hear something that appeals to your credibility makes you more liable to believe what you hear. In other words, coffee is an aid to brainwashing.

And to think that I stopped drinking coffee for a time because I thought it made me more irritable and contentious!

Caffeine revs up the brain, claims the study, and thus makes you more open-minded, that is, easier to persuade. When I was teaching college students, I proceeded on the assumption that a boost in braininess would make them less gullible, more critical and discerning. You mean a shot of caffeine can undo all the hard work of a liberal arts education?

Even a couple of cups of coffee can make you more easily convinced by arguments that go against your beliefs, say Pearl Martin of the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, and her colleagues. How? By enhancing your attentiveness, it improves your ability to follow and understand the other's reasoning.

As far as I can see, this would work equally well for arguments that favor your beliefs, especially if they are cogent. We may see a dramatic change in worship practice because of this finding: pastors will insist on serving coffee before rather than after the morning service. If Tim Horton's is on the ball, we may soon see an outlet in every megachurch.

Not long ago parents were pressuring schools to remove soft drinks containing caffeine. Maybe that was a mistake. Maybe schools should have coffee percolators in the classroom.

Hazardous duty

Some people on rural routes are no longer getting mail delivery because Canada Post carriers are refusing to stop at their mail boxes. Too hazardous, they say. The postal workers union has apparently empowered their workers to refuse to do the job if they consider it too dangerous. No, it's not fierce dogs or wild bears that threaten the safety of our carriers. It's speeding cars. Not that the carriers are driving too fast, but the people passing them by as they stuff the mail into the boxes. Oh yes, and they also mention the danger of having to reach across to reach the mailbox. Repetitive strain injury has done in many a mail carrier. And paper cuts!

Let's hope the same union doesn't organize our firemen and policemen. Or CRC pastors.

Golden years

Remember those happy, carefree days of your youth? Well, forget it: you're probably wrong about how happy you were back then. According to a recent study: "People generally appear to become progressively happier with their lives until the mid-70s when health issues or a loss of a spouse start to have a major impact on day-to-day life."

Participants in the study were divided into different age groups and then asked to rate their own happiness now as well as the happiness of other age groups. "In all cases," said the researchers, "people in the older group reported a current level of happiness for themselves that was significantly higher than the self-rated happiness of younger participants."

That seems to gainsay the notion that older people have a negative bias toward old age. They seem to feel they have it pretty good. The professor in charge speculated that as we age we feel less driven to achievement and become more oriented to relationships. I guess that's another way of saying that when you're retired you no longer have to worry about the job and you can hang out with the gals and shoot the breeze.

The prof added that we stop "sweating the small stuff." Actually, at a certain age, everything begins to shrink and become a bit blurry, doesn't it?